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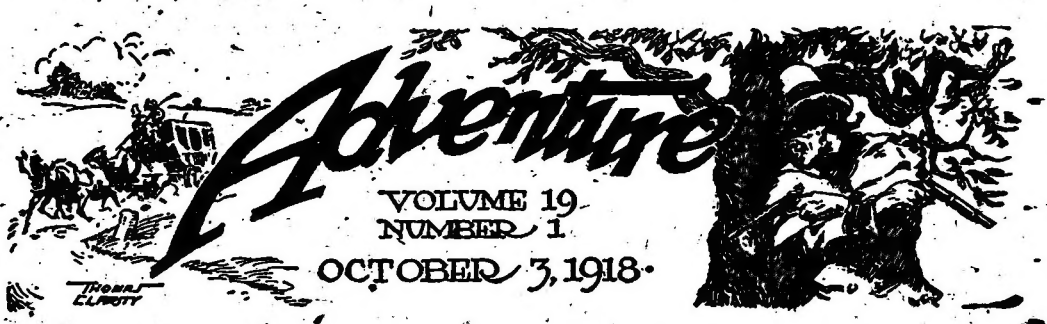

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THE MIGHTY MANSLAYER

By H. A. LAMB

A tale of the thirteenth century when the Chinese army gathered to end the power of the Tatar tribes. A *Khlit* story.

A SAGA OF MEN

By KATHRENE and ROBERT PINKERTON

A story of the far, far North—and why two men risk their lives in its barren wastes.

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MID-OCTOBER NUMBER

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HIGH STAKES

A COMPLETE NOVEL

by ROBERT HOWARD

IT WAS chilly, not far from midnight, and MacDougal was penniless. He looked about at the few people on the street: most of them slinking along, worn out with life, tired, hopeless, but afraid to die. Some pushed through the swinging doors of saloons, looking for a warm place and a chance at the remnants of free lunch. Others shuffled over the pavement and searched the face of every passerby with the sharp eyes of the forlorn moocher. They simply hung on to life because they were afraid to die.

Scornfully the thought occurred and recurred to MacDougal.

He was not afraid. Better to go than drift about, bumping into other derelicts. He had not eaten for two days. He had not slept, except standing against a wall or lolling half-frozen on a park bench, for two nights. He knew no one. He had no friends. Even his name was not his own. Disappointments were behind him and the future—well, his brain was unsettled by sleeplessness, fatigue and hunger; added to that was the torment of shame and outlawry of which he was innocent, but all of which he had voluntarily assumed.

There was nothing to look forward to. He had given up all that was worth while. The heart, the fighting heart that makes men buffet the world, was numbed within him. Nothing seemed so welcoming, so appointed to his needs and moods as the river.

He was a bit nervous, but he did not feel afraid. He was actually curious. There was, too, relief in the knowledge that it would all soon be over. He wondered how it would feel to die—and what he would find.

Given a good meal, a friend and warmth, he might have been another man. The

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blood in a man can not be wholly that of a coward when he has done what Hugh MacDougal had done. He had been left parentless when very young, and an uncle had been as a father to him. The uncle had been kind and generous. MacDougal regarded him dearly: so dearly in fact that when his uncle, humiliated and broken, confessed that he had misappropriated in unfortunate speculation practically all of the funds in a large estate given over for settlement to the firm of which MacDougal was the junior member, MacDougal, without letting his uncle know what he was up to, skipped out.

He mailed a statement to the papers declaring that he had forged his uncle's name and squandered the money on the stock exchange. To MacDougal it seemed the only thing to do. He knew that his uncle would not have let him assume the guilt, but he believed—and correctly—that having assumed it, his uncle would not then make the confession that he had prepared to give to the bank. His uncle was highly regarded and trusted. MacDougal knew that he was a good man. Like most, he had his weaker moments.

MacDougal had dropped from sight as if he were actually the defaulter. He had watched the papers long enough to see that his plan had worked. His uncle—suffering, MacDougal knew how much—was nevertheless willing to make the most of the sacrifice that the boy had generously given. MacDougal had gone wandering.

In Pueblo he struck up an acquaintance with a fellow skilled in the ways of a hobo, who induced him to "beat it" to Denver. That night in a box-car the fellow laid him unconscious with a blow on the back of the head and had taken every cent. After that he worked at one thing and another for a while, then followed the harvest up through the Dakotas, made his way across to the lumber camps of Oregon, shipped on a lumber schooner for San Francisco, went out of San Francisco as a deck hand on a passenger for Sydney. In Australia he hired out to a selector, but the wife of the fellow was as Potiphar's, and MacDougal took to the night and the nearest port.

For four years around and around he had wandered, and coming back to the States in the Winter of 1913 he had made his first attempt to get in touch with his uncle; and had found that he was dead and had been dead almost a year. MacDougal had not dared to let any one know that he was still alive; and as a matter of fact there had been a few weeks when he was close to death with pneumonia, but he had pulled through in a county hospital and being discharged, was weak, without money, without friends in the most lonesome of cities, New York.

And now a few days later he felt that the game was over, that the candle had been burned.

He walked along the street with head up, though his shoulders drooped. He walked as a brave man, with no blindfold over his eyes, might walk out before the firing squad. Desperation and resolution were on his face.

No one would ever know whose was the body that was fished out. No one would care. He had wiped away his identity long ago. He regretted bitterly that it had been necessary; but he would have done the same thing again under similar circumstances.

He was not afraid, and slowly he made his way toward the river.

MACDOUGAL did not notice the tall man with a black beard, closely trimmed, who wore a buttoned overcoat of a military cut and stood in the shadows of a stairway keenly scanning the faces of the wastrels and nighthawks that drifted along the street. The man was the embodiment of energy. A casual glance would recognize that. He was not nervous, but was in no sense composed: rather tensely poised, a man trembling with inner power, dynamic will.

His face was the face of one who would see far and would move heaven and earth for his ends. His flashing eyes seemed searching for something, for some one, in the thin straggling line of down-and-outers: such fellows as make sections in the great serpent of hunger that is quite glibly called the "bread line."

His eyes were black, black as his beard; and his nose was thin, long, beaked. There was a certain irradicable distinction, not only in his face, but in his bearing. He was plainly out of place in that disreputable quarter, but he seemed to know very well what he was about. The eyes, cruel as his beaked nose, glowed with an indefinable,

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impersonal fierceness as they searched MacDougal's face when he passed.

And when he had passed the man stepped from the entrance and followed.

MacDougal turned down a dark side-street. The river was but a few blocks away: the river that washed against the embankments and seemed a placid black monstrous serpent laying its length through the city.

For a time he hung over the railing looking down at the black waters that went by like molten ebony. He was not debating. He was ready for his exit, but lingered a while to wonder what was before. On both sides the buildings rose sheer, themselves black with here and there a square of light casting a will-o'-the-wisp gleam over the river. He stared on. A great sense of loneliness was over him; but too, the feeling of the dramatic. Common, inevitable as it is, yet death to each man is epical.

At last he was ready. He balanced himself on the railing; he raised his arms above his head, determined to plunge deep, find the bottom, suck his lungs full of water and stay there. He took a deep breath, took it instinctively as a diver always does. The end was near; he leaned forward to let himself go and—a muscular arm clutched out of the darkness and caught his shoulder, jerking him backwards.

MacDougal, though ready to die, was startled.

He swung around and peered apprehensively, angrily, into the keen bearded face of the tall man who still held a tight grip on his arm.

"What—" MacDougal began, but the other man interrupted sharply.

"You were going to jump. Why?"

MacDougal, though he had been ready to die, was now a bit frightened. He swung around and peered nervously, apprehensively, into the bearded face.

"You were going to kill yourself. Why?" The question was impatient, insistent.

"You a detective?" The words slipped from MacDougal's lips.

The fear of some day being caught was never far from him. If caught he would be worse off than if guilty. He could not even try to clear himself.

"No. Now answer me. Why were you going to kill yourself?"

There was much in the personality of the stranger that commanded respect. He spoke with the manner of authority. His words came sharply, commandingly.

MacDougal was irritated. He had worked himself into the mood for suicide, and this was not only an anti-climax but he resented the tone of the stranger.

"I do not see that it is any of your business," he replied.

"Perhaps. Answer me. It may be worth your while. Are you a criminal?"

The question was blunt. The inquiry about "detective" had probably given the cue.

With a sense of relief rather than in defense of himself, MacDougal said emphatically:

"No. I'm not."

"Then why——"

The stranger made a nervous, comprehending gesture toward the river.

"Why? Oh ——, why? I was down on my luck. Why not?"

"You were hungry?"

The man asked it as though he had heard that such things could be, but was rather incredulous. There was no sympathy in his voice.

"Men don't go about taking cold baths on a full stomach. It's bad for the digestion."

MacDougal did not like the fellow. He could not see him very plainly, but he did not like what he could see. He did not like his voice.

"You have no money?"

"You are a good judge of human nature."

"Then I have saved your life?"

"You have—and say, if you want a little medal for life-saving, just bring on your affidavit. I'll swear to it."

The sarcasm was not good. It was that of an exasperated man, and seemed to be wholly lost on the tall stranger who said:

"You have no friends? Relatives? Nobody looking for you or who would miss you?"

"What do you want anyway?" MacDougal demanded.

He was growing tired.

"I may want much if you fit my needs. I can give you food, money, clothes, luxuries to which you are probably unaccustomed."

"That sounds interesting."

MacDougal was afraid to let himself believe that the stranger really could, or probably would, supply all that he had

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suggested. It had a sound of unreality. A lunatic might talk that way.

"Interesting? Is that all?"

"No, it isn't all. I am hungry. I haven't any money. I haven't any friends. I'm alone. I've gone up and down the world a bit and got tired out. I was ready to call it off, and you came along and——"

"You were going to throw your life away. Will you give it to me? Forget your identity and accept the one I offer you. Food, clothes, money—anything. You can have them all."

"Trying to play the devil?" MacDougal asked, more incredulous than ever, but thinking of the *Faust* legend.

"No. You will be required to do nothing dishonorable. You will be required to do nothing in fact but to take on a new identity, to ask no questions and to answer none."

"What's the game?"

"It will be none of your affair. You will be required to do nothing dishonorable. More than that I can tell you nothing—now. But you can't evade the agreement once you accept."

"Want me to stick my head in a sack?"

"You were ready to jump into Death's sack, head and all."

"And if I should try to evade the agreement—what then?"

"It would be dangerous," and by the way he said it MacDougal knew that it would indeed be dangerous.

"Just what are the terms of the agreement?"

"I told you. Accept another identity. Ask no questions and answer none. That is, no more than you are instructed to answer."

"There's nothing about it that's likely to get me entangled with the law? I wouldn't want you to duck from under and leave me holding the sack."

"No. Nothing of that kind."

"Your proposition sounds mighty phony."

"You can have a big dinner tonight and a warm bed. Tomorrow tailors and money and a car."

MacDougal was impressed. Food and a deep, warm bed. His bones ached and he was weak with hunger. But he asked:

"Whose identity am I going to take?"

"That of my son."

"Your son! You want to run me in to take your son's place in something? I don't believe it."

"I have no son. I had one years ago. As a baby he was stolen. I have scoured many countries searching. I have given up hope. I want some friendless young fellow to take his place in my home."

MacDougal did not believe him. Only a rich man could scour countries, and no rich man would be around rescuing down-and-outers from the river and accepting one of them as his son unless there was a deep game back of it all. MacDougal did not like the fellow anyway. But he was hungry.

"If I find you have lied about that, can I consider the agreement is ended?"

"Yes. You accept then?"

"I haven't accepted yet. I am not particularly timid, but I don't like to jump into a mystery blindfolded."

"You were ready to jump into the river—into the biggest mystery of life."

"That's different. It has to come sooner or later anyway."

"I can't tell you any more than I have. You may accept or not. I have no time to waste."

"Now listen. I am hungry and tired. I'd accept most anything for a dinner and bed. But if I see myself headed for jail—if I see myself being turned into a scapegoat, I'll—I just want to warn you that I'll be dangerous, too. If you try to give me the double-cross, well—you had better remember that I am not going to lie down without a murmur."

"I have given you my word."

"I know," MacDougal said. "A lot of men have given me their words. That's why I want you to know how I feel about it."

"You accept? Good. Then come with me."

MacDougal gave the river a parting look. Some way it did not appear nearly so inviting. He wondered how he could have been such a fool.

II

THE tall black-bearded stranger strode ahead. He seemed almost to ignore MacDougal. It was as though having settled one little detail in his plans he was unreservedly giving attention to other things.

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MacDougal with difficulty kept pace with him, and when they came to a street light MacDougal whistled noiselessly. He knew that he would never be able to talk familiarly to the man again, at least not with a feeling of ease. The face was hard and imperious. It was the face of one born not only to command, but of one born in command.

They walked for several blocks and came to a waiting limousine, strangely out of place in that shabby district.

A short burly chauffeur, with a foreign face and an ugly scar across it, touched his cap in a military salute and drew open the door.

The black-bearded man got in first. He did not invite MacDougal. He did not say anything. MacDougal hesitated for a moment, rather wondering if he was expected to get in or to get up with the chauffeur. The chauffeur continued to hold the door open. MacDougal got in.

The motor started. The man settled back and closed his eyes, but he did not sleep. From time to time he lighted a cigaret.

In silence they rode on and on. MacDougal did not know the city at all well, so what he could glimpse through the window indicated nothing to him. It seemed hours. They had left the business district, they had passed through interminable residences, and reached a locality in the suburbs where the houses were imposing and sat back from the road in spacious grounds. MacDougal could not see plainly, for the night was not moonlit, but here and there lights burned on the porches or blazed from windows and he did not need to know the name of the neighborhood they were entering to know that it was, if not exclusive, certainly an expensive district.

The limousine stopped. MacDougal, alert, listened and heard the chauffeur climbing down. But he did not open the door. MacDougal peered out: the chauffeur was opening a gate. They drove through, and the chauffeur again got down to lock the gate. Such precaution made MacDougal a little uneasy.

A hundred yards further and the limousine stopped under the arch of a big, square-built stone house.

The black-bearded stranger got out first and MacDougal followed. The chauffeur started to open the heavy door of the house when it was thrown wide by a big, bland foreign-appearing fellow who bowed obsequiously to his master. No one seemed to give MacDougal the slightest attention. The bland butler scarcely looked at him, or seemed scarcely to look at him.

In the house MacDougal quickly looked about him. It had the appearance of gloomy luxury. There was a heavy silence as in a tomb. The entrance door opened into a large hallway, and broad stairs ran up in a semicircle. It did not have the aspect of a house, but was like—he did not at first know what, but decided that it more nearly than anything else resembled an old castle somewhat refitted.

The man and the butler rapidly left the hall and closed the door behind them. MacDougal stood looking about him. It was uncomfortably like a dream. He was weak and hungry and felt shabby; but also he was curious. On one side a double doorway led off into what appeared to be a library. The walls were paneled, and on the floor were thick rugs. A great white bear-skin lay at the foot of the stairway.

The place was gloomy. A widespread chandelier hung, unlighted, from the ceiling. The only light came from a tall, pedestaled bronze maiden that stood at the lower end of the banister and lifted a big, heavily-glazed globe with both hands high above her head.

MacDougal wished himself out of there. He did not like the appearance of the servants. The scarred-faced chauffeur looked capable of wicked things, but even more so the bland butler. The master himself did not have an appearance or manner that was reassuring. MacDougal was sure that there was something wrong somewhere.

His eyes roamed about, rested on a broad picture but could not, because of the gloom, distinguish what it was a picture of, searched the tapestry drawn half-way back across the double door, estimated the size of the the bear that would furnish such a rug, followed the sylph-like form of the bronze maiden up to her glazed bowl of light—then, without knowing why, his eyes suddenly shifted upward to the top of the stairway, and he found himself looking straight into the bright eyes that peered down at him from a strangely

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beautiful face caught in the reflection of the light.

Her face melted away—backward into the darkness. He strained to see and hear, but caught no sight of her and heard no sound. It was unreal—that face. He had seen thousands of women, but never such a face. He wondered whether he had really seen it. He was feverish, and might have imagined things; but he did not believe that he could ever have imagined such a face. Its bewildering beauty was surely due to the effect of the light: no woman could be that beautiful.

The door opened and the man and his butler returned. MacDougal was tempted to speak of the face he had seen, but one could not speak of such things to either of them. They were cold. As they came in they were talking a language that MacDougal did not understand: a sizzling, crackling language it seemed to him.

"Step forward, monsieur," the butler said in perfect English.

MacDougal stepped forward.

"Monsieur—" the butler spoke impressively—"monsieur, you have the honor to be in the presence of his Excellency, the Grand Duke Sergius!"

MacDougal gasped. He could not help it. Everything seemed unreal, preposterous. That face—and now a grand duke! He must be out of his mind, his fancy feverish. But he bowed slightly.

The grand duke spoke sharply in Russian, then turned and left the hall. Hugh, watching him, wondered vaguely how it could possibly be.

"If monsieur will come with me," the butler said.

He led the way up the stairs and opened the door into a lighted, big, comfortable room.

"The bedroom—" the butler threw open another door and disclosed a mountainous, white bed.

"The bathroom—" and another door was flung wide and revealed a large tub set into the floor of pearly tiling.

"If monsieur cares for lunch——"

"Monsieur" tried to leave no doubt that he did care for lunch.

The butler at once withdrew.

MacDougal, dazed, wondering if this were not more of his feverish dreaming, stared about him. A grate fire glowed cheerfully, and before it was drawn a deep leather chair. He took another look at the bedroom. Snowy silk pajamas were laid out, and beside them a large, padded dressing-gown.

MacDougal did not hesitate. He grabbed up the pajamas and the gown and went into the bathroom.

WHILE he was soaking in the delicious water the butler tapped on the door and announced that the lunch was prepared. Hungry as he was, MacDougal delayed the lunch until he had had full enjoyment from the warm water.

When he came out the butler had gone, but laid on a table drawn close to the fire, and served on silver, was a lunch fit for the Czar himself: the creamy meat of chicken in a steaming casserole, ruby jelly, olives, anchovies, browned water crackers, one or two other dishes that did not appear familiar, and a samovar.

"A doctor would say this wasn't exactly the thing to break a fast on," MacDougal remarked to himself as he began to eat, "but I never had much use for doctors anyway."

The food was good, the boy was hungry, the fire glowed cheerfully.

" 'Arabian Nights' haven't anything on me," he mused comfortably as he turned from the emptied dishes and stretched his toes toward the grate.

"All I need now is a smoke."

He looked about him and then went to the buffet, and rather blinked at the assortment of bottles and decanters.

"Fond father must have expected his long-lost boy to be thirsty. Wonder what the devil his game is? Ah, here is what I want," and selecting a big, black, fat cigar he returned to his deep chair before the fire and meditated upon his good-fortune.

At least it was good at present—and as for the morrow? Well, if he had such good food and such a comfortable bed as that one in the next room appeared to be, he felt that he could take care of the tomorrows as fast as they came.

He grew drowsy, fell asleep, had a bad dream and awoke with a start.

"Poor time to be getting nerves," he said, shivering slightly because the fire had died down and the room was a little chilly.

MacDougal judged that it must be close to three or four o'clock, and gratefully he climbed into the deep, soft bed. Though

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worn with fatigue he seemed unable to fall asleep. He swam between sleep and waking, and fantastic visions, half-dream and half-speculation filled his head.

Presently he heard muffled sounds, indistinct, suppressed. Gooseflesh stood on his body. He sat up, groped to find the light at the head of his bed, but when he found it he reflected that it might be as well to keep the room in darkness.

Stealthily he got out, pausing at every step to listen and feel his way. He went into the next room and approached the door. The sounds continued: they began to seem like some one crying. Cautiously he turned the knob and barely opened the door.

A woman was crying. It sounded as though she was directly across the hall from him.

He had seen only one woman and naturally he associated the crying with her. He wished that he could do something; but he did not know what to do. He might get himself into a mess if he knocked on her door and offered his services. It might get her into a mess. But he wished to find out anyway, and on any pretext, who she was and, if possible, why she was crying.

He stepped back and closed the door, then switched on the light and pressed the button that had been indicated in case he wished for something during the night.

"What can I do?" he asked himself. "She is sobbing as though her heart was broken, but she may only have the toothache. If I heard anybody abusing her I would take a chance. I can't very well go over there, rap on the door and introduce myself as a panacea for a toothache."

In what seemed a remarkably short time the butler appeared—appeared, rather than came. MacDougal wondered if the man slept in his clothes, for certainly there had not been time enough to dress.

He was unctious and curious.

"I'd like to know what that noise is?" MacDougal said with a simulated air of irritation. "It disturbs me."

He felt that it would be better to pretend ignorance than to show this fellow, for whom he had a decided dislike and suspicion, his sympathy for the crying woman.

The butler stood for a moment listening, just as though he had not before heard the noise that MacDougal spoke of.

"It is too bad that monsieur has been annoyed. That is the Countess Olga. The lady is most unfortunate—her mind—" He touched his forehead significantly. "Monsieur understands? She has an illusion that she is held prisoner and kept from marriage with—with a very high nobleman. Pure delusion. It is regretable that she has disturbed monsieur—but to speak to her—ah, she is excitable. Very excitable, and—ah, to be frank, monsieur, she has a temper."

"She is the daughter of——"

"No, monsieur. The niece. It is too bad—her crying so loudly."

"That is all right. I didn't know exactly what it was. Being in a strange house, you know. I wanted to find out."

MacDougal went back to bed and again had trouble in dozing off. He did not believe that the possessor of the face he had seen staring at him from the top of the banisters had anything wrong with her mind. That she might have a temper—that seemed reasonable. But that she wanted to marry a nobleman—that she wanted to marry anybody, vaguely troubled him.

THE next morning MacDougal awoke late. He bounced up, feeling fine, splashed in the cold water and rejoiced mightily that he was not being fished out of the river and hauled off to the morgue. The sun was high and bright, and the gloomy feeling seemed to have been dissipated. It is hard to feel gloomy on a bright morning.

He looked at his shabby clothes, and decided to remain in the dressing-gown rather than return to them. He rather feared if he got back into those castoff rags that his dream—he rather felt it was a dream—would vanish.

Evidently the butler had been waiting and watching for him to finish with the bath, for he was no sooner through than a rap came on the door.

The butler wished to say that all of monsieur's meals would be served in his room, and that if monsieur had a preference for any dishes he, the butler, would be honored if monsieur would name them.

MacDougal asked that a little Virginia ham be included if convenient; and was told that from tomorrow morning on it would.

After breakfast MacDougal sat smoking and looking from the window. The fire burned brightly, for the air was crisp

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despite the bright sun, and he felt contented with the world. He had been told that the tailors were coming that morning, and for a few days, two or three, until they had fitted him out he knew that he would be kept confined to his room. He could not very well go wandering around in a dressing-gown, and he did not care to go in the discarded clothes. He did not wish to appear shabby in case the eyes that he had seen over the banisters should again peer at him.

A tailor and his assistant came with samples of cloth and tape. They seemed bursting with a desire to please. MacDougal could not express admiration for any color or texture, but instantly they both agreed that it was very fine, the very best. They fussed about nervously, and when the selections had been made, they said that they would hurry, that they had been told it was a rush order, and that he would have at least one suit by the morning of the second day.

HE WAS left alone for the next two days, and spent much of his time looking from the window and thinking. He saw no one but a lame gardener who puttered around. The woman did not appear, nor did he hear her crying again, though he listened attentively. It seemed to him very strange that so little attention was given to him in some ways and so much in others. No one had even inquired as to his name. Perhaps it was thought that his name did not matter.

There was a desolating stillness about the house that got on his nerves, even in the daytime. There were no sounds. The butler came and went, but MacDougal never heard his footsteps. He felt that he was being spied on, yet his commonsense told him that there was nothing to spy on him for. It was just the sense of mystery and strangeness that not only permeated the house, but was back of the manner in which he had been brought to the house, presumably to impersonate the son of a grand duke.

He found a few books in the room, novels and late ones, presumably purchased for his use. There seemed to be no details overlooked for his comfort, and he wondered if all this was not a kind of solicitous pretense to keep him satisfied and to keep him from becoming suspicious. He was, in a way, satisfied; the comforts were gratifying after the experiences he had gone through, but he could not suppress his suspicions. Something seemed wrong. Something was wrong.

A man could not be brought into a house, as he had been brought in, without something being decidedly wrong. He remembered how the grand duke had searchingly inquired if there was any one who could be concerned if he, MacDougal, disappeared; and the manner in which he had asked MacDougal to consider that his life was being bartered for food, bed and money, gave him an unpleasant thrill every time he thought of it. But MacDougal did not lose his nerve. He enjoyed the comforts, even down to the novels.

When his clothes arrived, after an irritating number of fittings and alterations which the artistic souls of the tailors seemed to require, MacDougal dressed himself with care, largely because it was a source of satisfaction to be able once again to dress neatly, and strolled through the grounds.

It was not exactly a country estate. The entire grounds did not take up much more than two acres, and similar grounds flanked it on both sides, and across the boulevard. But none the less the place of the grand duke seemed isolated. For one thing there was a high fence, topped with spikes, strung to ornamented poles, and the only entrance was the gate of the driveway. What impressed MacDougal most forcibly, and unpleasantly, was the absence of people about.

True enough there were servants and plenty of them throughout the day, but they were silent people who moved about their work and so far as MacDougal knew, scarcely said anything among themselves. They came in the morning and left at night, being brought and taken away in the same machine. MacDougal judged not only by their appearance, but by the strange words that he did hear occasionally pass between them and the butler, that they were Russians.

Probably, he thought, servants who had been gathered because of their nationality and who were provided for in a common lodging-house more or less under the supervision of Sergius. They came each morning promptly at seven and left promptly at seven in the evening. Between those hours at night there were,

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MacDougal thought, only Peter and the chauffeur, Sergius, the unknown woman and himself in the great house. MacDougal would have felt more comfortable if the seven servants, including the lame gardener, had remained nights.

There was something mysterious in their departure shortly after dark as though they were fearful of staying on in that lonesome mansion. And at night every one excepting the butler, whose name MacDougal learned in time was Peter—and that he was more than a butler, a major domo in fact, or more even than that—was out of sight. Only Peter noiselessly came and went. The chauffeur remained invisible except when the car was brought around; and he had not again so much as heard the young woman.

MacDougal did not know how much liberty was his, but he tried to inspect everything he could without appearing to be curious. He was curious, Intensely so. He discovered that the house was much larger than he had thought, and its size made the absence of servants all the more noticeable.

"Too much calm," he told himself. "Too much calm. It isn't natural."

HE WAS sitting before the grate with a book open on his lap but finding little interest in the text, for there was much to think about and wonder over, when Peter came to tell him that the grand duke wished to see him.

"Here's where the fireworks start," MacDougal reflected.

He followed Peter with interest, for their course lay through a part of the house other than that he had ventured into. Peter led the way down-stairs, and opening a large door off the hallway disclosed another stairs leading down to what he imagined was the basement. Peter went down this, and coming to a door, rapped softly. A quick-spoken word from the inside caused Peter to push the door open gently. It had not been entirely shut.

MacDougal was surprised to notice its thickness, and if the door had been shut he doubted if any one could hear what was said inside. It was over two inches thick: doors of that kind are never put in place by accident, and they serve a definite secretive purpose.

The room into which MacDougal was shown was large and practically bare of furniture, except for a large desk, covered with papers, at which the grand duke sat, and two chairs and an extremely large cabinet.

Among the peculiar features of the room were, first, the absence of windows, the lighting being by electricity, and the paneling. The paneling was odd indeed. It looked like some grotesque effort at ornamentation that had taken the form of a room built of doors. It was rather bewildering. In fact, when the door through which he entered had been closed by the retiring Peter, MacDougal could not tell just which panel it made. He might have done so by close inspection, but he did not have the opportunity.

The grand duke, looking more imperious than MacDougal had remembered him, sat at the desk and looked steadily, fiercely at the boy. He seemed literally trembling with energy, energy that had to be restrained and repressed, when he was impatient to release it. The man had a tremendous, though unpleasant personality. His face was cruel, but also it was the face of a man who sees far and has patience as well as ambition.

The grand duke spoke crisply:

"I told you that you could have much liberty. You are free to go and come as you please. You will be given money—liberally. A car is at your disposal. But do not remain away longer than twenty-four hours. You shall not seek any one you know. If any one attempts to recognize you, deny your identity. You have no identity but that which I have given you. Your name?"

"Hugh MacDougal."

"It is Leo Nashdike. That is the name you were brought up under. Not that a name matters——"

"But I thought——"

"I am doing the thinking for both. It is well that you are dark, your face is thin, your features distinct and finely marked. I am not complimenting you. I am only calling attention to a few of the things that caused me to select you as my son. There is perhaps a trace of resemblance between us. Certain people will see it anyway. They will be looking for it.

"I must trust you not to talk to any one, and not to let any one get information out

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of you. I choose that certain people shall in time know of you, but I choose that it shall be done when I see fit. In time you will openly take the identity of my son, but at present that might prove embarrassing.

"Another thing." He paused, and MacDougal felt the force of his steady, hard-driven gaze: "Having told you as much as I have, and having as much as I have at stake on your faithfulness, it seems needless for me to call your attention to the fact that I have other means of intelligence than my own eyes."

MacDougal said that he did not doubt that in the least.

"You will be carefully watched. Moreover, you will be carefully watched by certain other people with whom I have no connection, but whom I am watching—or having watched."

"What kind of a game is this anyway? I think I ought——"

"Enough of that!" The grand duke's voice rang out ominously.

"But——"

"You shall do as I say——"

"But you said that I was not to get into trouble."

"You are not to."

"This looks like trouble to me. Not that I mind it a great deal, you understand, but I like to know what I am poking my head into."

"You have agreed to impersonate my son. I do not choose to argue with you. I do not choose to explain. I am very generous toward you. But you—look——"

He pointed across the room, and as he pointed a panel swiftly opened and disclosed a long dark passage-way. The grand duke was standing at the desk, his arms were folded, but in glancing at him—in trying to see what had made the door open so mysteriously—MacDougal saw that he had pressed a knob of the desk with his knee.

"One false move from you," the grand duke went on, "and you will be carried through the passage and never heard of again. Have I made myself plain?"

MacDougal hesitated a moment, then taking a step forward said quietly, but tensely:

"Yes. And I want to make myself plain, too. You try to put anything crooked over on me, and you may not go out of that door and never be heard from again, but you will go out of some door around here—and people will be carrying you, too."

"A very theatric young man, I see," the grand duke answered sarcastically.

"No. I'm not. But while threats are being passed, I thought I might as well let you know how I feel about it. If you want to take me into your confidence and show me that the game is clean and honest, I'll go the limit with a will. And you won't have to talk about anybody being carried out of a secret tunnel and never heard of again. But I may as well be honest. As long as I am in the dark, I am suspicious. That's the truth."

The grand duke stood for some seconds scrutinizing the boy closely.

Then he said:

"I am glad to see that you are not lacking in personal courage. What would you say if I were to tell you that as my son you may be in danger from nihilists?"

"I suppose I'd feel uncomfortable, but I don't think I'd back out. No. I wouldn't. Not as long as you have been on the square with me."

"I shall be frank, then. Through you I shall try to get in touch with a party of nihilists. Your danger is not great. That is one reason—" he said it with an ingratiating smile, and instinctively MacDougal felt that he was lying—"I am not willing yet to have it known that you are my son. The nihilists stole him when he was a baby. I know that they lost track of him. That is why none will know that you are not actually my son and heir.

"You will have money and you will have a car. You may go as you please and come as you please. You may make yourself at home in the house—the library, the grounds, anything excepting my own room here, and the rooms used by the servants and Olga, are at your disposal. Can I be more generous?"

MacDougal said that he did not see how. But he was still unsatisfied with the explanation about the nihilists, though the grand duke plainly indicated that the conversation was at an end.

"Some other time—and I'll pin him down," MacDougal assured himself as he left the room. "But he looks to me like a capable liar."

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III

THE next morning MacDougal found a broad flat wallet on the tray which brought his breakfast. He checked his curiosity until Peter had arranged the things and gone out. Inside he discovered a thick layer of bills, and he counted something over four hundred dollars. There was no note, no instruction, nothing. He thought at the time that perhaps the amount was to do him indefinitely, but he was later to discover that a smaller package, containing one hundred dollars was on the breakfast tray every Monday morning.

This had something to do with changing his feeling toward the grand duke. It is rarely that one who is generous can be long disliked.

When Peter returned for the breakfast things he asked if monsieur—Peter always called him monsieur, and seemed neither to know nor to care what his name might be—wished the car.

MacDougal said that he did.

Peter inquired the time.

MacDougal named ten o'clock.

MacDougal could not get it out of his head that there was something of a farce about it all. Peter, from all that the eye or ear could detect, was obsequious to the point of humility; yet behind his mask, psychically, there was, MacDougal felt, a kind of mockery; an attitude that seemed to indicate: Oh, I know all about you, what you are here for, and what is to happen to you. I am willing to play this part and do it well; but you are only a little, insignificant pawn in the game my master plays, and I know all about that game.

There was nothing tangible of this, but MacDougal could not escape the impression that it was exactly how Peter felt.

Nor could MacDougal make the butler seem human. He answered questions with a minimum of words, and offered nothing that did not have to do with his duties. There was no getting behind his mask. The fellow possessed all the attributes of an automaton.

At ten o'clock Peter came to tell him that the car was waiting, and with the service that is only given to persons of importance preceded MacDougal, opening the door of the machine for him, and bowing him into it. MacDougal, extremely sensitive to all that took place around him, watched Peter closely—watched him curiously, almost in amusement. And he saw Peter glance up and far away across the boulevard. The glance had something in it of one who has acted for the benefit of spectators. No one was in sight: but from a distance a watcher could have observed through glasses.

The chauffeur stopped, got out, unlocked the gate, and having driven through, stopped and again locked it. This precaution was always made. Obviously it meant that the fence about the place was more than an ornament. Perhaps it was to keep some one out. Perhaps to keep the woman in.

They had not driven more than a mile down the boulevard when a big car whizzed by them. It went by so rapidly that MacDougal only caught a blurred impression of two people, a man and a woman, in the tonneau: but he knew that both of them had looked intently at him.

"What is your name?" he asked the chauffeur.

"Feodor, sir," the man said brokenly.

"Whose car was that?"

Feodor replied, with a wicked smile, that he did not know.

MacDougal did not like the chauffeur. He did not like the way Feodor muffled his face. The goggles hid his eyes, and a scarf-like cloth, as though about his neck for a sore throat, was arranged in such a way as partially to conceal the scar on his chin and neck. The man was squatty and thick-bodied; a powerful-appearing fellow, and there was a peculiar mocking smile on his lips. Perhaps that was but the sinister effect of the scar. MacDougal, however, felt that it was something more.

"Haven't you any idea whose car it was?"

"No, sir."

It seemed that Feodor was with difficulty keeping back a laugh as he said it.

After that MacDougal did not talk with him farther. There were many things that he would have liked to talk about; some of them injudicious: he wanted to ask about Olga especially, but was sure that Feodor would report everything into the ears that he served.

IN THE city MacDougal did not know exactly what to do. He had no friends. He did not care to try to make any. That, too, might be embarrassing. He was half-tempted or rather

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he thought of it as a possibility, without having any intention of doing so, of calling a detective agency into service to find out something about the grand duke and his ménage.

The woods, as MacDougal well knew, are full of imposters: bogus princes, counts and whatnots. A grand duke is a rather important personage. It means one of the Romanoffs—or did at that time—one standing close to the Russian throne: a brother of the Czar. Impersonating the son of a grand duke put MacDougal in line to the throne of Russia. He laughed to himself as he thought of it. Nothing could be wilder.

Having nothing to do, MacDougal drove around, made a few purchases of things that he did not particularly want so much as he wanted something to do; went to a vaudeville show, and afterward to a café.

Feodor waited across the street.

MacDougal wondered if the chauffeur was the spy that had been set at his heels, but felt that surely more cunning had been used. He had been as much as told that he was being watched by other parties, nihilists, and that still others were watching the nihilists who were watching him. He had tried to spot these trailers, if there were any, but had not been able to discover anybody that seemed to have particular interest in him. Nevertheless he was uncomfortable, not nervous, not afraid, but simply irritated.

MacDougal did not like mystery or hocus-pocus. He was almost half-convinced that the grand duke was bogus, and that the talk of nihilists and spies was merely word-painting to make the situation realistic.

In the café he was shown to a vacant table and looked about him. Many people were coming and going, but he sat with his face toward the entrance and was intent upon discovering who, if any, were following him.

In a few minutes, among those that entered, there came two men. MacDougal noticed them only because the younger could not evade notice. He was the type of man who is looked at, stared at, and causes those discriminating in their judgments of people to wonder who he is.

The younger man was thin and dark; his face keen, his eyes brilliant. There was something of the keenness and cruelty of a finely ground blade about him; and he seemed restless with energy, not fidgetty, but full of explosive power. Too, his thin lips were cynical.

He glanced at MacDougal: glanced at him casually and his sharp eyes went on around the room, apparently indifferent to who was there. He was accompanied by a larger and more contented-appearing man: the sort one would scarcely notice twice, but having noticed twice would discover that he was not perhaps so sleek and contented as he at first seemed.

The reason that MacDougal noticed them in particular was that they both appeared foreign without, however, disclosing any distinct nationality.

They took a table across the room from him and further from the door so that he could no longer watch them without changing position or staring over his shoulder. He at first thought of changing his position but to do so would mean that he would no longer be able to keep his eye on the entrance; and in watching those who came and went, particularly those who came, the two men slipped from his thoughts.

THE woman came in alone and walked directly to MacDougal's table as though by appointment. But she did not speak to him. She appeared to ignore him.

He did not ignore her.

She was unmistakably foreign, Polish or Russian. He was sure of it. A woman well into middle age, bold but not unattractive of face, black-eyed, looking very neat in her furs and Cossack hat. Her lips were red, palpably colored, seductively molded. He studied her closely and with little attempt to hide the fact that he was studying her. Her face, while intelligent and possessed of a certain prettiness, had an underlying stratum of coarseness: not coarseness of mind so much as coarseness of blood.

A glance, for instance, at the face of the woman who had peered at him over the banisters was sufficient to let any one realize that she was of patrician blood; one would have recognized it had she been met in an alleyway. This woman had the big-boned wrists and ankles—he took pains to look at her ankles, which she made no effort to keep from any one's eyes—of those not

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far removed from peasantry. Her face, however, was intelligent, not intellectual, but the face of one who has wits and keeps them from rusting.

She seemed to ignore him. In fact she sat indifferently staring past him, and once or twice he thought he caught a gleam in her eye that indicated that she was looking at some one she knew; but for the most part she simply glanced about impersonally, and when her eyes fell on him it was as though he were nothing but glass through which she could see with ease.

Presently the waiter brought him a note. At first MacDougal declined to accept it, believing that a mistake had been made. But the waiter insisted.

"Who sent it?"

The waiter said that he did not know; that it had been given to him by the head-waiter, and that he, MacDougal, had been indicated as the person to receive it.

MacDougal opened it and with some difficulty made out the words, written painfully in poor English on a piece of paper evidently torn from a notebook—

Lok out. Her nam Rachel Sobetski.

It was puzzling and sinister.

MacDougal tipped the waiter and asked him to make inquiries as to where the note came from.

It obviously referred to the woman across from him. He detected that, when she thought his eyes were busy elsewhere, she was giving him a scrutiny that showed a decided interest. The note was a warning. MacDougal wondered if he ought not to leave. He was not afraid: he simply did not wish blindly to get into complications, but he concluded that he could not put in his time running from complications, and as a matter of fact it seemed that only by getting into complications would he be able to find out what all the plot and counterplot involving him was about.

It might be that she was an agent of the grand duke to see what indiscretions he could be coaxed into; but in that case it would be unlikely that any one would have warned him. It was more likely that she was one of the mysterious party against which the grand duke was directing his operations.

The waiter returned to say that the note had been handed in by the doorman, and that the party who gave it to him was a short, heavily built man with sore throat.

That could be none other than Feodor; and undoubtedly the note was intended as a good turn. But MacDougal did not wish to arouse the woman's suspicion that the note contained anything applicable to her, or even of importance. So he continued to pretend to be puzzled, and tried to appear as though confident that the note had not reached the party for whom it was intended.

The waiter, unconvinced but dubious, went away.

MacDougal sat sipping a cordial, gazing at the ceiling and pretending to listen to the music. He was wondering what on earth the woman expected to gain by silently maintaining her place opposite him.

But abruptly her silence ended. In a tense low voice she addressed a quick sentence to him. He did not know what it was, but guessed that she spoke in Russian.

He glanced toward her. Her eyes were on him.

"I beg your pardon. Were you addressing me?"

She smiled knowingly, confidentially, and spoke again in the foreign tongue.

"I am sorry, but I understand only English—" then prompted by an impulse to baffle her, added—"at present."

"So?" she said with skeptical amusement.

"Just so."

"You are not angry with me for my little mistake?"

"No. One would hardly be angry when addressed by you."

He put just the slightest of flattering emphasis on the "you." MacDougal would have disdained a flirtation. He was not of the breed to take up with a strange woman at any time; but this, he knew, was something more than a flirtation though she might perhaps give it that guise to lead him on. It was she, however, that chose to do the leading.

She smiled encouragement, and added—

"I am a stranger here—and you?"

He did not know just what bit of information might be valuable to her, and he did not propose to take the risk of giving her anything that might be of value, and so replied evasively, but good-humoredly:

"I? I am a stranger in the world."

"So young?" she smiled.

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She scored there, but he was wary against being tricked into a definite statement.

"You," he replied, "should understand that it is no disgrace to be young."

She studied a moment in flirtatious silence, looking up at him from beneath fluttering lids, and asked—

"Are you reminding me of the past, or——"

"The present, indeed. The present."

"One would think that compliments came lightly from your tongue."

"One," he answered, "would be thought laggard not to direct them easily to your ear."

"You have no difficulty with replies. Why evade questions in—" she stopped.

"In what? Your native tongue?"

"No less than yours, is it?"

"I might answer better," he said, "if I knew what it was."

She laughed in plain disbelief, but accepting his words as jest.

"You know very well what I said," she assured him.

"Did I not tell you that I understand English only—at present?"

"What language is it you hope to understand—presently?"

"There is the sign language, wonderful for——"

"Bah," she interrupted good-naturedly. "Think to play with me?"

"I have no doubt that you would be a delightful playmate."

"Are you never serious?" she asked.

"I am serious now. But tell me, what language is it that you speak so fluently that I fail to understand?"

She studied his face, seeking to get behind his thoughts. She studied with a look of such intentness that MacDougal was sure she was determined to find out something about him.

"As though you do not know?"

"As though I do not know," he replied. "And tell me what it was you said with such earnestness in that language. You spoke as though trying to drive something into my head—to surprise me. What was it?"

"Do you really wish that I should repeat it in English?"

"I do."

She fastened her eyes on his face and with a kind of sneer said:

"I will translate. I said, You are no more the grand duke's son than I am!"

MacDougal was astonished. He felt as though something had been knocked from under him, but he kept his poise. He more than kept his poise: he assumed an attitude of anger to conceal his surprise, and spoke tensely—

"And why do you say that, Rachel Sobetski?"

At the mention of the name her body contracted. A convulsive expression of amazement and fear wrenched her face. She shrank back with a gasp, staring at him with a look of terror in her eyes.

MacDougal was as much amazed as she. He had thrown a bomb without knowing it. There was no doubt as to her identity; there was no doubt as to her fear.

He did not venture to remain longer. That she was ready to dispute his impersonation of the grand duke's son was enough to show him that he had better get away. He took his leave. He did so politely, thereby adding to her discomfiture.

MACDOUGAL was no sooner out of the café than the woman arose, and in spite of an effort to conceal her perturbation, was in a state of high excitement when she went back to the table where sat the two men MacDougal had noticed.

"It is he!" she said breathlessly. "I am convinced. You are right, Jean. There is no question about it."

Jean Guyot, the younger man, looked at her through puzzled, narrowed eyes. The elder man said coldly—

"We could see, Marie, that you lost self-control."

"He astonished me so!"

"What did he say?" Paul, the elder, inquired.

Jean said nothing. An observant person could have told that he was very much interested in trying to guess what could have happened.

"What did he say?" she repeated. "Oh, he said—that is, he said he was a native of Russia but that he had not been there since babyhood. That he had been kidnaped when an infant and only recently had discovered his father."

"And did that astonish you so much?" Jean asked, cynically incredulous.

"Everything put together. And he is

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the image of the grand duke. I saw it at once."

"Still," Paul suggested, "he might have been coached."

"Of course," Jean said as though carelessly smoothing out a detail of no importance, "he has been told who his father is. And what is there to be suspicious of? How does the grand duke yet know of our plans? None but you and I. Have either of you broached it?"

He asked it in a voice that boded no good to any one who had dared to so much as whisper that plan, and both hastened to assure him that nothing of the kind had happened. He was the youngest of the party, but there was no doubt as to his leadership—though nominally the elder man was the leader of all the nihilists.

"You both know very well by this time," he went on, "that I have ways and means of finding out things. We all know that the grand duke's son did disappear almost from his cradle. We know why the grand duke disappeared from the court, and it was given out that he was dead. He was too ambitious, for one thing. He has searched wide and far for his son. That has been for more than twenty-five years. A long time. I knew less than a week ago that he had found him. How I knew is my own affair. Then I suggested this plan which you approve, but for some reason you are suspicious of the son. Marie here insisted upon meeting him—and she becomes flustered and excited. Convinced, I hope.

"Now I want to ask you again and for all time, is it reasonable to suppose that he, brother to the Czar, would take up as his own son anybody that had not been clearly proved to be his son? Answer me that."

Both admitted that it was unlikely that such would be the case.

"Very well, then if he gives to us his son as a hostage—can we not proceed along the lines I have already explained?"

"I don't know how you find out so much, Jean. I don't know how you so rapidly develop plans. But you are a marvel," the elder man said admiringly.

"Yes. A marvel," the woman agreeed.

"It is settled then," Jean answered.

But he was looking with puzzled, ominous eyes at the woman.

The woman did not notice. She was wondering miserably how on earth that strange man came to be aware of that name which she had tried for years to conceal—one that it would be exceedingly dangerous to have Paul, her present husband, or Jean, know belonged to her.

AS THEY were driving home, MacDougal asked quickly of Feodor—

"Why did you send me that note?"

Feodor shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"Why did you do it?"

"I did not know you would know," he answered brokenly.

"Know what?"

"That it was me. I know her. You not tell it was me? Not tell her?"

"No. I did not tell her. But why did you do it?"

"You not tell his Excellency? No?"

MacDougal was surprised by that. He had supposed Feodor was one of those who carried everything to the grand duke. But he promised. It gave him a sort of companionable feeling that he could share a secret even with so villainous an appearing fellow as Feodor. Here seemed to be wheels within wheels. And because the woman had shown such consternation at the mention of her name MacDougal was determined to find out how Feodor had come by it.

"How did you know her name?"

"Me? Ugh—" he pulled down the scarf and pointed to the scar. "She do that. For years the nihilists know somebody carry secrets to the police. The police call her Rachel Sobetski. Nihilist know nobody by that name. They know somebody of them is who the police call Rachel Sobetski, and they are furious to find out. I find out—by accident. I never tell. I am no nihilist. —— fools. That years ago. A week, less, I see her. I remember. Ha! She and her husband. I get 'em yet."

"But how did you find out?" MacDougal persisted, very much interested.

"Ugh! She was my wive! An'——"

He again pointed to the scar, but nothing more could MacDougal get out of him.

IV

MACDOUGAL, after thinking it over, concluded that he would tell the grand duke what had happened, but he was in doubt whether to mention the note that Feodor had sent to him and

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pretend that he did not know from whence it came or to say nothing at all about it. He wanted to tell the grand duke of the incident in the café for two reasons: first to show him that he, MacDougal, had tried to play the game wisely, and secondly, because he was afraid some one of the grand duke's agents would report that he had been seen talking with this woman and the grand duke would be extremely suspicious if it appeared that MacDougal was holding conversations with people and not saying anything about them.

When he returned to the house he told Peter that he would like to speak with the grand duke. He said it in the hallway, and any one listening at the head of the stairs could easily have heard.

Peter inquired as to the nature of matter that he wished to take up with his Excellency, explaining that his Excellency was an extremely busy man and that he, Peter, had been told to serve monsieur in every way.

It was not so much what Peter said as his manner that indicated to MacDougal that the butler was something more than a butler, and expected MacDougal to tell him just what he wanted. As there did not seem any particular reason for secrecy, MacDougal quite bluntly told of how the woman had come to his table in the cafe and said—

"You are no more the grand duke's son than I am!"

"But you are, monsieur!" Peter insisted, apparently not so much surprised that any one should doubt his identity, as intent upon convincing MacDougal that he should not for a moment neglect to play the part.

"I know it," MacDougal said, feeling that it was expected of him to say it.

"Good. And this woman? What was she like?"

MacDougal told him, and Peter said, "Ah, ah," two or three times.

Then when MacDougal had told him a part of the story, Peter said:

"Come with me. It is important that his Excellency should know."

As they passed through the hallway a girl who had been listening above the banisters started down the stairs.

She darted into the library and stood behind the portieres until Peter came back and went about his work, then she slipped down the stairs and through the narrow hall that led to the grand duke's room.

WHEN MacDougal had said that he was approached in the café by a woman who told him that he was no more the grand duke's son than she, the grand duke had asked rapidly:

"Black-eyed? Coarse hair? Neat and had a good deal of red in her hat? Voice not unpleasant but rather throaty? Mrs. Lucka."

He spoke as though perfectly familiar with the lady. A trace of a smile was visible. What she had done or might do did not appear to worry him.

"No," said MacDougal. "When I called her Rachel Sobetski she nearly fainted."

"When you called her what?" the grand duke cried, springing up nervously and reaching toward a drawer from which he drew a revolver.

MacDougal did not get excited. He looked from the grand duke's face to the revolver which he had drawn but not leveled, and he repeated calmly—

"When I called her Rachel Sobetski."

"Who are you?" the grand duke demanded, bringing the revolver more into evidence.

"Hugh MacDougal."

"It's absurd. Absurd," the grand duke said, as though reassuring himself. "You couldn't be a spy. Nobody knew whom I was going to pick out that night."

He returned the gun to the drawer and closed it.

"Pardon me," he went on stiffly, "but how did you know that she was Rachel Sobetski?"

"If you had given me a chance to explain, I would have."

"Go on. Explain."

"She began the conversation in some language which, I suppose, was Russian. Then she began talking in English when I suggested that I might not understand any other tongue. While we were talking the waiter handed me a note. It told me to look out for her and said that her name was Rachel Sobetski. I asked the waiter where it came from, and he said that he did not know. I asked him to inquire and he did, but said that he could not find out—that it had been handed to the doorman. Then I thought that some of your agents—you mentioned that you would keep other eyes than your own on me—might have sent it in as a warning."

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"Let me see it." The grand duke was plainly disturbed.

"I did not keep it. I tore it up on the way home."

"Fool!"

"What?" MacDougal snapped.

"I said you should have kept it."

"Well please don't abbreviate so next time," MacDougal replied angrily.

"I know who that woman is. But she doesn't know that I know. She doesn't think that any one knows. And you let her know that you do! A pretty mess. Who the devil could have sent you that note?"

"I asked the waiter to do all he could to find out."

"And she didn't think you were my son? Well, by God, I'll make her think so. You are my son. Do you know who she is?" He asked the question quickly.

"How on earth should I know?" the boy replied. Then as quickly, "Who is she?"

"A nihilist. One of the leaders."

"And do you think she is planning to kill me?"

The answer to that question came from an unexpected source. The door of the room had not been fastened. Neither of them had noticed when it gradually became ajar. As MacDougal spoke it swung open, and the young woman he had seen over the banisters stood stern and beautiful.

"I will kill you myself!" she cried, and on the instant fired.

MacDougal wheeled. The deafening report filled the room, and he reeled back from the impact of the bullet in his shoulder.

She screamed something at him in a foreign tongue.

The grand duke swore, leaped forward, and struck the gun upward so that the second shot went into the ceiling. Then he wrenched the pistol from her hand and struck her.

It made MacDougal's blood surge hotly to see that beautiful, exquisitely featured, flaming-eyed girl struck, though, to a certain extent it might be said that she was struck in his defense.

"What's the matter with you?" he said, clutching his shoulder and coming toward her.

The grand duke was trying to shove her through the door. He raised his fist menacingly, but she stood defiantly, glaring past him at MacDougal. He had spoken in English, and she answered in English:

"I won't marry you! I won't!" she screamed.

The grand duke struck her.

"Marry you!" MacDougal cried, pressing forward. "I don't want to marry you. I wouldn't marry you—what does this mean?"

He laid his hand roughly on the grand duke's shoulder.

"Back!" his Excellency shouted. "Stand back. This woman is mad."

"You can't force me to marry her," MacDougal stubbornly insisted.

"Mad, am I?" she hissed at the grand duke. "And you—" to MacDougal.

There seemed no words adequate to convey her feelings, and with a haughty gesture she, figuratively, swept them into the limbo and left the room.

MacDougal demanded an explanation. He demanded it at once and furiously; and without giving the grand duke a chance to explain went on:

"I thought you said there was to be nothing dishonorable? I'd like to know what you call that! I won't marry that woman. I wouldn't marry any woman against her will—not for all the money you have. You can take your money and your luxuries and go to ——. What do you think I am?"

The grand duke had regained his composure and stood inscrutably looking at MacDougal; and when the boy had finished he said something in a strange tongue.

"I don't understand you, and you know it."

MacDougal attempted a gesture with his right arm, but it was useless. However, the pain was forgotten. He continued, clenching his left hand and shaking it:

"You talk plain English to me, I want to know what's behind all this. What did you say?"

"I said," the grand duke replied slowly, distinctly, "you poor, miserable fool."

MacDougal stared at him in amazement and rising anger.

The grand duke continued:

"No one wants you to marry her. You couldn't if you desired it above all things. She is the Countess Olga. She is the owner of the largest and wealthiest estates in Russia. Perhaps in the world."

"Evidently—" MacDougal indicated his shoulder—"she has good reasons for

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thinking you mean to make her marry me. Women don't go around shooting fellows without some excuse."

"She is crazy."

"Why does she think I want to marry her?"

"There is a Captain Alexis of the Palace Guard. He is—or was—determined to marry her. She thinks all men are. She might have married him. He loves her——"

"But you wouldn't let her?"

"She is out of her head. That's one of the reasons I have this place here secluded from the world. A woman of her position can't be put in an asylum. I have made this a private asylum. She has gone crazy over marriage. She thinks every man that she sees has been selected as her husband. And," he concluded with suppressed anger, "you will please be a little more respectful in your manner and words hereafter."

MacDougal said nothing. He wished that he were well out of the affair.

"Let me see your arm. Is it badly hurt?" the grand duke asked coldly, and examined it without sympathy. "Not much. Seems to be the collar-bone. Nothing serious."

He twisted the arm about painfully, but MacDougal kept a straight face and made no protest.

"It will be all right in a few days. I shall have a doctor called. It was an accident. You were cleaning a gun—you understand?"

MacDougal said that he did.

THE collar-bone was broken in MacDougal's shoulder. The doctor called it nothing of importance, but he bound the arm so tightly across MacDougal's chest that the muscles cramped excruciatingly and he was in much more pain from the remedy than from the wound. He could not dress himself very well and Peter served as valet, but even that intimacy was not sufficient to get Peter to talk of anything outside of his duties.

MacDougal was in a very uncomfortable frame of mind. Almost against his will he was inclined to the belief that the beautiful Olga was somewhat unbalanced. Still he could not wholly believe it. Hers was an intelligent face. He had seen anger written on it, the quivering anger of a refined, high-spirited woman. It was possible that she was really mad; but he did not wish to believe that. He preferred to believe that the grand duke was a scoundrel.

For two days he walked about the house and grounds hoping for a chance to speak with her. He wanted to explain that he was not and would not be a party to any scheme to force her to marry him. If it would reassure her at all he was ready to say that he would not marry her under any circumstances: yet he wished that she were not one of the richest of Russia's women and that he could meet her equally.

He knew which was her room and passed it several times, each time thinking that he would knock. But each time he walked on, preparing something to say when she should come to the door, and he never was able to be quite satisfied with what he thought up; so that he did not knock at all, but trusted to chance to afford a meeting.

Chance did not play the part that he had hoped for.

MacDougal took the car out several times during the week that followed, and went on long drives. He tried to get better acquainted with Feodor; but the chauffeur was impenetrable. He seemed to think that MacDougal was really the son of the grand duke, or if he did not think precisely that, he did think that MacDougal was a person of some importance. The fact that they shared between them the secret of the note that had revealed the identity of the woman in the cafe, did not have the influence that MacDougal had expected it would. Feodor insisted upon keeping his place. Too, he seemed to insist that MacDougal keep his.

MacDougal drove about aimlessly, sometimes going far out of the city and at others winding around through the down-town traffic, seldom getting out of the machine. He had no idea that he was being followed; but he knew that he was one day, about a week after he had been injured, when he stopped at a confectionery shop to have wafers and hot chocolate.

He had not known ten minutes before that he was going to stop where he did, and yet he had scarcely seated himself at the table before a woman, heavily veiled, passed; and as she passed she laid a folded typewritten message on the table.

MacDougal caught only a glimpse of her. He was not sure but he thought it was Rachel Sobetski—whatever name she might now be under.

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The note said:

Do not say anything to anybody about it, but meet me this evening at eight o'clock at the Cordova. It is a matter of life and death. Destroy this carefully. Trust me. You must. A private room has been engaged. Say you are Mr. Ralston.

It was then late in the afternoon.

The woman had evidently followed him for hours, awaiting an opportunity to slip the note into his hands.

MacDougal did not know whether or not to go. There was the chance that he might learn something of importance. "A matter of life and death"—that might mean anything or nothing. He felt that it was worth taking the risk, though he had to resort to his fancy to think of just what risks were involved. He had not promised the grand duke that he would not keep appointments with strange ladies. He had promised that he would not tell them, or other people, anything pertaining to himself.

PROMPTLY at eight o'clock MacDougal stepped through the entrance of the Cordova.

He mentioned to the head-waiter that a room had been reserved for Mr. Ralston, and the waiter turned him over to another who escorted him up the stairs and back through a row of private dining-rooms. He was shown into one, and was a little disappointed that no preparations seemed to have been made for the dinner. To MacDougal it looked quite bare and uninviting. Not even the silver had been laid.

He inquired if the waiter was sure that this was the room reserved for Mr. Ralston, and the waiter said that it was.

It was the last one in the hall, and the hall window opened on a fire-escape that dropped into an alley below.

MacDougal glanced about him. He had a feeling of discomfort, of disappointment. He wanted something—he did not know just what; but he gave the waiter a gold-piece and told him to send out for flowers.

Those at least would cheer the room up a little.

He glanced at his watch. It was fifteen minutes past the appointed time; and whoever was coming was late.

But even as he returned his watch to his pocket the telephone rang.

A woman's voice asked—

"Mr. Ralston?"

"No—er—yes," he stammered, remembering.

"I wasn't sure that you would come. I shall be there in a few minutes. Wait for me, please."

There was a hint of coaxing in her tone.

"Yes. I shall wait."

She hung up.

He sat down and lighted a cigaret, then pressed the button and reached for the menu. It seemed to him that it would be well to order the dinner. If no more preparation had been made for it than the room indicated, it was time that he started to stir the chef up.

MacDougal was not wholly indifferent to the thrill of dining with a strange woman who came, as she had said, on a matter of life and death—even though he had an idea as to who the woman was.

The waiter came in, and MacDougal gave the order. He tried to make it choice and took pains; and while he was puzzling over the dessert the woman arrived.

"That will be all—at present," he said to the waiter, leaving the dessert for future consideration.

"Good evening," she said.

Her voice was throaty. He was sure that she was the same woman who had approached him the first time, though she was heavily veiled. She wore a short street skirt and a short coat, something like a man's top coat.

"Good evening," he replied, rising and extending his left hand. His right was still bound to his chest. "Haven't we met before?"

"What is the matter?" she asked quickly, indicating the bound arm.

"An accident. Nothing at all. Laid up my arm for a few days. But have we not met before?"

"Yes. I gave you that note today."

"And before that?" he asked significantly.

"We shall never meet again," she said coolly and with an inflection that caused MacDougal to stiffen slightly.

"I don't understand."

"You will," she replied. "What do you know of Rachel Sobetski?"

"I see. We have a tribunal. And what is there to know of Rachel Sobetski? Is she a figure of some importance?"

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"You will kindly answer my questions."

"First, I must inquire as to your authority. I am not inclined to answer the questions of strangers. Particularly strange questions."

"This is no time for humor. You know very well who I am. I am Rachel Sobetski. What do you know of me?"

"Won't you sit down?"

"Will you answer me?" she demanded angrily.

"Not when you ask it like that," he said and turned away.

In an instant the woman was transformed: a knife flashed in her hand. Again and again she plunged it at MacDougal's body. He sprang back, surprised, and tripping over a chair, fell flat.

Even as he was falling, he realized that he was at the mercy of the woman once he reached the floor. His right arm was already helpless, and in attempting to stab him in the chest and heart she had driven the knife into his arm and wrist, and slightly cut his left arm with which he had tried to ward off her blows. He had not thought to cry out for help. There are men who do not cry out, even when handicapped.

But as he was falling he saw that he would be at her mercy; realized that no matter how loudly he might call she could finish him on the floor before help arrived. So he fell heavily, groaned as though mortally wounded, and flung his left arm to one side as though too far gone to have any idea of defending himself. He was dripping blood.

The ruse worked. The woman stooped above him for a moment with knife poised. He seemed dead, and she had cause of her own for making haste.

Quickly she tore the hat and veil from her head and jerking a man's soft felt hat from under her coat stuck it on. Then she drew off the top coat and dropped her skirt, and stood forth in the man's clothing which she had worn underneath.

MacDougal did not move.

At the door she cast a backward glance at him, but he lay rigid.

She closed the door, jumped to the window at the end of the hall, raised it, and disappeared down the fire-escape.

MacDougal set up. He was more bloody than hurt. He had no idea of giving an alarm. He knew that even if he had been murdered the grand duke would not want the police called in; and MacDougal was beginning to think that, after the way this woman had boldly used her knife, that perhaps the grand duke was playing an honest, though dangerous game against nihilists. That he was the grand duke's son seemed reason enough for their wishing to assassinate him; but he knew very well that the woman had been spurred to such desperate work because he had revealed the knowledge of a name which connected her with traitorous dealings with the police. The fact that she was now, as the grand duke had said, one of the leaders of the nihilists, would make her all the more anxious that they should never learn of her past operations.

MacDougal got to his feet and slipped into his long overcoat. He felt rather weak, but he wanted to get out; and the coat concealed his bloody appearance.

As he went out of the door he met the waiter coming with the flowers ordered to cheer the room.

"I say, take them down-stairs and wait for me," MacDougal quickly instructed, wishing to keep the waiter out of that room, with its blood-stains and discarded woman's clothing, as long as possible. "I have made a mistake. There is a table down-stairs waiting for me."

"Very good, sir."

"Just leave them with the head-waiter for the time being." And as MacDougal hurried through the entrance and to the car where Feodor was waiting he said to himself, "The irony of that creature—to say it would be a matter of life and death." Then to Feodor: "Drive a few blocks, then look for a drug-store. I have to telephone my doctor that there have been complications."

V

AS MACDOUGAL rode homeward he was sore and stiff and disgusted. Being attacked by women did not suit him. He did not know what to do. He had let the doctor think that he had been beset by negro thugs for his purse, but he did not know what to let the grand duke think. There seemed no use trying to conceal the escapade from him. MacDougal concluded it would be better to make a bold confession, admit that

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he had been trapped, and let the grand duke say what he pleased.

But MacDougal felt very much ashamed of having been trapped. Curiosity more than anything else had led him into the private dining-room. He had wanted to find out about Rachel Sobetski, or to find out some of the things that she could undoubtedly tell him. She had prepared carefully for the murder. By discarding her coat and skirt, and appearing in a man's clothes, she not only was disguised for escape in case MacDougal made an outcry and set the police after her, but also, in man's clothes she could more readily run and climb down the fire-escape.

MacDougal knew that it would not be wise to let the grand duke think that he had been actuated by curiosity. The grand duke did not want MacDougal to have curiosity, and had as much as told him so. It seemed to MacDougal that what his Excellency wanted was an automaton: something or somebody that would not only not ask questions but would not have the desire to ask them.

"I suppose there is nothing to do but to tell him," MacDougal reflected as the car purred up the driveway.

For the first time Peter did not open the door. He seemed always to know when MacDougal was coming, or else to be perpetually on the watch for him. But tonight MacDougal opened the door for himself. He was a little surprised that it was not locked, but remembered that the high fence about the grounds offered almost as much security as a locked door to those inside of the house.

It was around eleven o'clock. The big bulb held aloft by the bronze maiden at the foot of the stairway did not entirely cast out the shadows, and MacDougal again felt, as he always did on entering the house at night, that there was something mysteriously wrong and tragic about the place. And as usual, he glanced quickly, hopefully, up toward the head of the stairs, hoping again to catch a glimpse of the beautiful face that had peered down at him the first night.

PETER was not to be seen. MacDougal knew the way back to the grand duke's private room, but he hesitated to go unannounced. The few times that he had gone to it Peter had preceded him as though it was important first to determine if the grand duke was willing to be interrupted.

This semi-formality had been so strongly impressed on MacDougal that he went to his own room and rang. He waited. Then impatiently rang again. Peter did not answer.

So fortified with a good excuse for not having announced his coming through Peter, and aware that the evening's incidents could scarcely fail to seem important to the grand duke, MacDougal descended the stairs and made his way back through the hallway.

The door was half-open. With no thought of spying he glanced inside just as his hand went up to knock.

He did not rap, but checked his knuckles an inch from the door as he saw within the room Olga busily, feverishly, going through the papers on the desk. Her manner plainly showed that she was not there with any one's permission.

At that moment she wheeled as though made aware of his presence by some psychic sense and their eyes met. In momentary confusion she tried to put the papers she held behind her.

Seconds passed and neither spoke.

Then she cried angrily, defiantly:

"Tell him you caught me. Let him beat me—murder me. You'll do it now. I know what you fiends are up to."

"I am no spy," MacDougal answered, trying to speak calmly.

"Why should a murderer be contemptuous of a spy?"

"I am no murderer," he replied, puzzled and recalling vividly that she had tried to kill him.

"You think to feed me with lies!"

The situation was unpleasant, and, moreover, he had been half-convinced that the woman was mad. Yet MacDougal, though exasperated that she should suspect him of villainies, and not at his ease in trying to convince her that she was wrong, was glad that he stood face to face alone with her. For one thing—perhaps it was the real and complete reason—she was, in the full glare of light and when he could look at her steadily, as beautiful as she had seemed in the fleeting glances he had had of her.

Tall and thin-featured, that is with nose delicately formed, eyes wide apart and narrow and bright, she stood erect and

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fearless before him. Her lips were exquisitely curved and red, eloquent even in silence for by the slightest of a downward twist she expressed contempt and doubt for his protestations. Her dark hair was wound in serpentine coils about her head, and the fine texture of her dark, olive cheeks was flushed with anger. Long jet pendants were suspended from her ears, giving her a peculiarly effective, though slight, touch of the barbaric.

"You think me gullible because I am helpless!" she went on. "I wish I had shot straight!"

"How can one so beautiful be so cruel?"

MacDougal did not intentionally say it aloud; but the thought was in his mind and it slipped to his lips unaware.

"No compliments from you, sir!" Olga cried fiercely. "You beast! Marry you! I would die first!"

"Now listen," he said stepping forward, business-like and intent. "I don't want to marry you. I have no intentions of marrying you. I have no intentions of letting anybody make me marry you. And I am not a murderer. I never hurt anybody. I don't know what you are talking about."

MacDougal meant it. She could tell that he did, and it surprised her.

"These papers," she said, tapping the desk significantly, "speak more convincingly than your tongue."

"I don't know anything about those papers."

"You don't? And you are his son—the Czarovitch-to-be?"

"Czarovitch? Crown Prince of Russia? Not much. I should say not," MacDougal replied, carried into an emphatic denial by his wish to convince her as well as by the belief that no such preposterous thing could happen to him.

"Bah! You can't trick me that way. I have seen! You assassins. You barter with cowards to strike in the dark. You dare not face the men at whom you aim. It was not for nothing that Sergius was long ago banished from court and the report officially given out that he was dead. It is not for nothing that he has lived under the name of Northdike for twenty years. You assassins! Lost son! I don't believe he ever lost you!"

MacDougal was angry. Also a bit alarmed. Perhaps the woman was crazy; yet her manner was unlike that of a demented person though her words were certainly insane. But there was something convincing about her and her words, incredible as they sounded. He was flushed with anxiety to know how nearly she was speaking the truth. That there was something sinister and deadly about the grand duke, MacDougal had felt almost from the first glimpse of him; but the talk of nihilists had been so plausible that MacDougal was undecided as to whether the man had not really told the truth.

"You call me an assassin. What do you mean by it? You tried to shoot me. Tonight another woman—as little known to me as you—tried to stab me to death. What's back of all this?"

She looked at him keenly, her head high, puzzled by his manner and words.

"You are in this plot." She said it as though to reassure herself, and again tapped the papers on the desk.

"Would I be standing here talking to you this way? Wouldn't I have called Peter or the grand duke himself and reported that you were spying in this room?"

"No. They're not here. It's the first time they have left me alone. I've waited for the chance. I suspected something. Now I have found out what."

"Of what are you talking? I am in no plot. I am no murderer," he insisted.

"Would you," she asked slowly, "help to prevent a murder—a series of murders?"

"If I knew a murder was planned—or a series of them."

"Who are you?" Olga asked quickly, seemingly shaken in her opinion that he was the grand duke's son.

"I can not tell you that—now."

"His son. He told me so."

"I believe that I am supposed to be his long-lost son."

"How did he come to find you?"

"You will have to ask him that question."

"Then you are not his son—you know you are not?" she demanded.

"What has that to do with murders?"

"Everything. If I thought there was a drop of his blood in your veins I would trust you with nothing. Are you?"

"Convince me that murder is planned and—well, I will have nothing to do with murder."

She studied his face closely as she said—

"You are not his son then."

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"Why?"

"Read this."

She held out a paper which she had been concealing behind her.

MacDougal looked at it, but the paper was unintelligible to him. He shook his head.

"I can't make anything of it."

"I forgot. Peter said you spoke only English. You were stolen too young to know Russian," she said cynically. "Listen."

She read a list of names, and looked at him, waiting to see what he would make of it.

MacDougal in turn looked at her, but blankly.

"That means nothing to you?"

"Not a thing."

"And these numbers after each name—don't you see?"

She again extended the paper.

He shook his head. Perhaps after all the girl was mad.

SHE lowered her voice:

"When all of those names are checked off—dead—who remains? Who remains to ascend the throne of Russia? The Grand Duke Sergius will then come forward and let it be known that he is not dead. He is the youngest of the Czar's brothers. The Czar and his son must be killed. Then his two brothers and their sons—nine men and boys in all. None but Sergius could conceive of it. None but Sergius would be bloody enough to do it.

"Why are there no servants in this house? Why? Servants bear tales. Spies can be servants. That's why. Even I haven't a maid. That's why Peter is man-of-all work. Peter is trusted. Why is there a high fence around this place with an electric current turned on at night and an alarm in the house? Spies must be kept out.

"Oh, I knew there were dark deeds being hatched. I have waited and waited and waited to find this door unlocked when he was gone. I am his prisoner—he needs the revenue from my estates. He has always said that his son would marry me when he was found. He won't! I can shoot straighter than you think. He doesn't dare give me the least liberty, for he knows that I suspect him and I would let the Czar know where he is.

"I have listened outside there with my ear to the crack under the door and have heard voices—two voices. But when I knocked and had the door opened, Sergius would be here alone. He may be listening outside there now for all we know—and to-night we shall both be strangled!"

The words gave MacDougal a thrill. He glanced quickly over his shoulder, then went to the door and looked up and down the hall.

"Sergius and Peter went out together this evening. It is the first time I have been left alone. Oh, they are ready to begin their murdering. Sergius plays for the throne of Russia!"

MacDougal could not believe her. Her denunciation of Sergius was dramatic, but incredible—yet she almost convinced him. He was aware that insane people could make most convincing arguments out of nothing but the fabrics of their own fancy, and he feared that she had constructed a world plot out of a piece of paper which he could not read. Something of his opinion showed in his face, for she said:

"You do not believe me? Inside of a week, ten days at most, a desperate attempt will be made on the life of the Czar—but it will fail. It will fail."

"Are you a prophetess?"

"No. But you shall send a cable for me. You are free to go and come."

"But I am watched."

"Ah. You are not a Russian. They are always watched. The police watch the nihilists and the nihilists watch the nobles. But they do not let that interfere with their plans."

"Why are you trusting me?" he asked, rather surprised after the way she had regarded him at first.

"I can tell you frankly. I have nothing to lose. Sergius will strangle me for looking at his papers, not for trying to get you to send a cable."

"But I shall not tell him!" MacDougal exclaimed in horror.

"If you do not, then I shall not be strangled and you will send my cable," she said and smiled, not sweetly but rather doubtfully.

"Why should I do either?"

"Because—" and her eyes flamed—"if you do not do as I say I shall tell Sergius myself. We shall both be strangled then!"

MacDougal hesitated a moment, then cried—

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"You can't mean that!"

But he knew that she did mean it. She affirmed it simply, saying—

"I do!"

"But why—both of us would die!"

"And unless you send my cable my friends will be murdered. I have no love for the Czar, but his little son! Oh, those precious children—they stand in the way of this monster!"

"But if I tell Sergius—" MacDougal began reluctantly, not threatening, but testing her.

"That is what I expect you to do. Tell him! When you caught me here with his papers I expected to die for it. But I hoped you might be human. Are you?"

Before MacDougal had time to answer voices were heard in the hall. The grand duke was giving instructions to Peter. MacDougal could hear, but could not understand what was being said.

MacDougal looked at Olga, and she at him—

"We die," she said calmly.

"No!" he answered in a tense whisper.

"You will kill him? There is no other way."

Her voice was hopeful, encouraging, and a new light shone out of her eyes at him.

"No. Quick. Over there. Go."

He pointed to the side of the wall where he had seen the secret door open, and fumbling at the grand duke's desk came upon the knob that he had caught the grand duke pressing with his knee when the door had opened.

The door swiftly, silently flew open.

Olga gave an understanding glance, then turning toward the desk rapidly adjusted the papers she had disturbed and ran to the door.

"The lights?" MacDougal whispered.

"Were burning. That's all right."

"Hold the door open when I release this lever."

He let go and the door started to close, but she caught it and held it open for him.

MacDougal glanced along the edge of the door to make sure there was no lock that would catch and keep them imprisoned. If there had been he would have stuck something into it to keep it from snapping shut. There was none.

They stepped into the black passageway, somewhat wider than his extended arms, and the door swiftly, silently came shut, just as the Grand Duke Sergius came into the room.

FOR a moment the grand duke stood with contracted brow and eyes sweeping the room. There were no places of concealment in that room, so he knew the impression that he was not alone was wrong. He removed his hat and stripping his gloves tossed them carelessly on the top of a cabinet and sat down at the desk.

Inside the passageway MacDougal and Olga became aware, on seeing a tiny pencil of light shoot through it, of a small hole in the secret door. It seemed to have been designed less for the eye than for the ear; because when MacDougal applied his eye he could not command a view of the room, but when Peter came in—evidently having been summoned by a bell—he could distinctly hear what was said, but quickly gave up his place to Olga who could understand the language in which it was said.

When Peter withdrew she translated in the slightest of whispers—

"Peter is to be sure to leave word for you not to go out tomorrow as Sergius may want you."

The subterranean passageway was dark, black, but not chilly. Cellars and tunnels are, if not damp, warm in cold weather. The pencil of light gave no illumination, and MacDougal could not see Olga's face when she held her lips almost against his cheek to whisper.

They were in something of a predicament; for, as she pointed out, the grand duke was an indefatigable worker and often sat out the night at his desk. She knew because she had watched for chances to spy among his papers.

They went down the passageway far enough to be able to talk at their ease.

"We must find the other opening," MacDougal said.

"Yes. It is certainly not near. Oh, you will be my friend!"

Her hand reached out in the darkness and touched him.

"And they told me you were mad!"

"They have told me that until I almost believed them. Forgive me for wounding you—I was mad then!"

"You should have killed me if I had been what you thought!"

MacDougal was pretty well carried away

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by the intimacy with this fascinating girl, for though he could not see so much as the outline of her form, he could feel her personality, and the magic of her voice fired his blood—even though his blood had been considerably thinned by the dagger of Rachel Sobetski, and his body was sore and weak.

Suddenly she caught him, groping out till her hand touched and clinched his coat:

"We can escape! How I have prayed for it. Come. This leads somewhere!"

"And then?"

"I shall send my cable."

"I will do that for you."

"But you are not to go out tomorrow. The cable must go at once. Are you afraid?"

The hint of scorn was in her tone.

MacDougal was weak and tired. Besides, being allowed freedom to come and go as he pleased, and having the comforts of bed and food by remaining and retaining a vivid remembrance of the discomfort that attended him for months before he had been picked up by the grand duke, he had no great zeal for escaping. He understood the position: she had been kept a prisoner.

"Is it," he asked, "evidence of fear if I ask where we would go? Have you friends? I have none."

"But I must get away."

She had the insistence peculiar to determined women who have no thought of consequences.

"If preparation had been made for it—a place to go prepared—" he suggested.

"Another opportunity like this may never come."

"Now that we understand each other, I will make one for you. Let me assure you that you will not long remain a prisoner if you will accept my help in escaping."

"I would accept the help of the devil!" she replied passionately. Then added—"Pardon me—you know how I meant it."

As they talked they moved along, she having her way about finding the outlet even as he showed her why there was no occasion for finding it; which is a trick that women often succeed at, leading a man on to their purpose even while he convinces himself that they are being convinced that another course is the wiser.

The passageway was not narrow. In constructing it the designer seemed to have had in mind the probable need of using it for the conveyance of bulky things, such as, for instance, a large cabinet filled with papers that the owner was not desirous of having inspected by police who might enter the house or wait apprehendingly for a moving-van.

"If murders are planned——"

MacDougal stopped short. Far down the tunnel in the direction that they were going a door had opened, a sheet of light fell for some yards in the passageway, a form was silhouetted, then the door closed and all was black again. But footsteps could be heard coming rapidly toward them.

MacDougal sprang noiselessly to one side, pulling Olga with him, and whispering for her to flatten herself against the wall as much as possible and hold her breath, he did the same.

The footsteps came nearer. They were evidently those of a man who had often traversed the tunnel, for though he could not possibly have seen so far ahead as the tip of his nose, he walked with the assurance of one in a familiar place.

As they waited MacDougal could hear Olga breathing, and with his hand he pressed her arm warningly, not venturing to whisper. She placed her hand on his and clasped it tensely, and her breath became inaudible. As the steps came close, MacDougal took a deep breath and held it. He had miscalculated. It took the man longer to pass than he had counted on, but he held his breath though his head swam dizzily and it seemed as though his throat would burst.

They waited, hand in hand, breathing softly until the steps became faint. The door into the grand duke's office opened, a momentary sheet of light appeared and the form of the man passed out of the tunnel.

"NOW," said Olga, "we must get out!"

But the door was locked. They were prisoners.

The grand duke had no reason to fear that the secret door from his room would ever be used by any one who had not passed through the outer door at the other end of the tunnel, where evidently extreme precautions had been taken to keep out those that had no business, or unwelcome business, with him.

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Olga said something angrily in her own language.

"I beg your pardon!" MacDougal replied.

"Oh, it would be wicked in English! We dare not knock. But we must get out. That man will come back in maybe ten minutes, in maybe two hours. We can wait. We are two—and he has the key."

MacDougal was nearly exhausted. Even excitement is fatiguing, and beside what he had been through that evening he had a very sore arm and chest.

"Yes," he said. "But we have only three arms between us, and he may have a knife or a gun."

She again said something savagely in Russian to relieve her feelings, and added:

"I had forgotten. We are unlucky. But if we can't use Mister-whatever-his-name-may-be to help us get out, we can at least find out what he is about. Let us get back to that other door and listen."

"And if it opens while you have your ear at the hole?"

"It will open, that's all. The history of the world may be changed by what we hear. Do you prefer to knock on this door and risk it?"

"No. Let us go to the other and listen."

THE small hole in the door had perhaps been made for the purpose of permitting the favored person in the passageway to hear whatever might be said in the room, for it answered that purpose admirably but was of no use to the eye, for the line of vision that it afforded commanded nothing but a few feet of wall over the grand duke's desk. Both Olga and MacDougal tried hard to twist their gaze around so as to catch a glimpse of the man whom they could hear talking to the grand duke.

He talked in Russian, which caused MacDougal heartily to regret the tower of Babel, for Olga semed fascinated by the conversation. If he could have seen her face he would have known, too, that she was horrified.

When he asked her in a toneless whisper what it was they were talking of, she answered tensely—

"You!"

Then her hand sought his, and she held it sympathetically rather than with any indication of a more personal interest.

MacDougal grew weary, exhausted. He leaned against the wall, then drooped, sank to the floor and rested his shoulders against the side of the tunnel.

Olga kept her ear glued at the hole.

How long they were in the tunnel MacDougal did not know. He had lost all track of time, and was dozing feverishly when he felt himself being shaken.

"Come, we must get away from this door. He is preparing to leave and you must kill him. Hear me! You must kill him. I will help you. He must not get out of here alive!"

"What was said?"

"Awful things! I found out something that I can't believe! And yet—Sergius would do that! He is cunning enough to do even that!"

"What on earth?" MacDougal asked in agitation.

"I can't tell you now. It would take too long. It is a long history. But I know you are not his son! You are a mere pawn in their desperate game. We must get away together—and Guyot must not live! My life will be worth nothing if he lives. Yours either!"

MacDougal knew that she knew he had not understood a word that had been said in the room, and though he was alarmed by her warning, he suspected that she was tricking him. She wanted to escape. It was then natural that she should try to make him want to escape too, so that she could get out with him. She could not overpower Guyot by herself.

MacDougal was too weak to assault any one, or at least felt that he was. Besides he had no inclination to do murder.

He said so.

"They found you ready to kill yourself. They consider that your life belongs to them," she whispered as they moved far enough down the tunnel to be out of danger from the light that would come into it when the door opened.

He knew by that that they really had talked of him, and the manner in which Sergius by the river's brink had devilishly driven his bargain came vividly to mind.

"What are they up to?"

"You must get away! The cunning of them! Do you know a Rachel Sobetski—or a Marie Lucka as she is now called?"

"Yes."

"Go to her. Tell her you are not the

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grand duke's son. Tell her everything. Tell her to distrust that Jean Guyot. She can save you——"

"But she tried to murder me tonight!"

"Murder you? Impossible. She and her husband expect you to be given to them."

"Her husband—Feodor?"

"Feodor? I don't know. His last name is Lucka. You must tell her the truth before you are given to her. She won't believe you afterward."

"She tried to murder me tonight, I told you!"

"Why? They don't know that—" Olga replied, pointing back to the door, but the gesture was lost in the darkness.

"I came to tell him when I found you."

"You must either run away—to some other country and hide—or get to her and convince her that you are not Sergius' son. They are afraid of her. They will do anything to make her believe that you are his son. And tonight is your last chance. Sergius won't let you out of his sight again."

"How can the grand duke be afraid of her?"

"Because he must trust her. Why did she try to kill you?"

"Because I accidently learned her name that she has tried to conceal. Thinking that I know her name, she thinks that I know her history."

"Do you?"

"Part of it," MacDougal replied, remembering what Feodor had related.

"Will you—" Olga hesitated.

She had started to ask if MacDougal would kill the man who was soon to return through the tunnel; but spirited, almost barbaric as she was, and knowing that she played for the safety of a throne, she hesitated at murder.

"Will you—overpower this man and take the key from him?"

"Who is he? Perhaps he has no key but signals to some confederate on the other side?"

"I know who he is. His name is not Jean Guyot! And we must risk the confederate. I can't tell any one until I have told Alexis who Guyot really is—Alexis will kill him—as you should!"

"I know you think I am a coward. Maybe I am. But I have only one arm. My left. This man may be strong. He may break away from us and dash back to the grand duke. Then we would be rats in a trap."

"That is true. We must find some other way—but we must find it. Tell Rachel Sobetski that Sergius is making a dupe of her, and that you are not his son, that if she and her husband have you as a hostage they will have one for whom Sergius does not care in the least."

"What on earth——?"

"*Shh*—" Olga interrupted.

THE door had opened and remained opened for a few moments while the man stood saying his last words to the grand duke.

MacDougal and Olga were too far away to see him distinctly, and besides he had his back to them.

Then the door closed and the footsteps could be heard coming toward them.

Again they pressed themselves as tightly as possible against the wall to lessen the chances of his brushing against them as he passed.

All might have been well as before, but when the man came to them he stopped. MacDougal's heart stopped beating, too, for he reckoned that the man had sensed, if not heard, them.

It happened, however, that Jean Guyot, hastening along, deep in his own thoughts, felt the need for a cigaret, and stopped to strike a match.

As the match flared his eyes were intent on the cigaret, but the illumination was strong enough to bring within his vision the two forms pressed against the wall. It was as though spirits had appeared, and for an instant this man, whose wit was of the keenest and whose actions were prompt, hestitated in amazement.

And in that instant MacDougal let go with his left hand and drove his fist squarely into the jaw of Guyot. The blow was hard, for weak as he was, MacDougal inspired by the knowledge that it must be a telling blow, had put every ounce of his weight into it.

Jean Guyot reeled back, numbed, dazed. The match fell from his hand.

Olga sprang at him in the darkness. She was not a large woman, but she was strong and realized that Guyot must be effectively silenced. But Guyot was momentarily beyond resistance. He sank to the floor,

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striking his head on the cement, and lay unconscious.

"I have my hand over his mouth. Strike a match," Olga said.

MacDougal struck a match.

"Tear off a strip from my skirt. No, my underskirt—here, put your hand over his mouth and I will do it."

MacDougal passed his arm around Guyot's neck and pressed his hand tightly against the mouth of the unconscious man, while Olga rent her underskirt and, though she was inexperienced in work of the kind, did very well in fashioning a gag, after which, with broad strips well twisted, his hands and feet were tied.

"Now we must search him," she said.

A revolver was found in Guyot's pocket and a few keys, one of which opened the door later when they came to it. But, before Olga had finished, she found a roll of money, too large to be counted then, but appropriated with an exclamation in Russian, which being liberally translated meant—

"I need it in my business!"

MacDougal did not understand. He did not object to her taking the spoils of war, but it struck him as peculiar that a Russian countess would filch—if it was filching—money from an unconscious nihilist.

"Strike another match," she said when the one MacDougal had been holding burned out.

He struck it.

Before he was aware what she was about she had bent forward and catching his face between her hands, kissed him squarely on the mouth—then blew out the match.

"You mustn't see me blush! But you deserved my poor reward."

"Apparently not, if you must blush in conferring it," he replied.

"That's mean of you. I am sorry I did it!"

"I am not!"

"It was glorious of you! I was frightened motionless—I thought everything was lost. Then you struck him. That blow saved the Czar his throne."

She said it as though she believed it. MacDougal did not. The Czar and his throne seemed to be her obsession. Perhaps the grand duke was right, and she was a little mad. But she was beautiful, her voice was thrilling, her very presence radiated a fascination that caught MacDougal as the flame catches the moth.

"Now what shall we do?" he asked recklessly. "Something risky—something that there will be another reward in for me!"

He forcibly restrained his hand which wanted to reach out and touch her.

"Do my poor rewards mean so much?"

A note of sincerity, perhaps assumed, for she was a clever woman, was in her voice.

Anyway it was strong enough to encourage him to reply:

"They mean, my lady, more than anything has ever meant that came from anybody. And please—I am not presuming. I know that you are the Countess Olga, as high above me in station as you are above the world in beauty. But a lackey may look at a queen and love her! I looked at you the first night when you stood above the stairs. I have loved you ever since!"

"Let us get away," she answered. But her voice was gentle, almost affectionate.

THEY found that the passageway opened into the basement of what served as a garage, but it was some distance off the grounds belonging to the grand duke. The garage had been built seemingly for the purpose of concealing the opening of the passageway, and there was no indication of its having been much used, though a little roadster, evidently belonging to Guyot, was standing there.

"Just what we need!" Olga cried as they came up the steps from the basement and saw it.

"Where are we going?"

"I must send my cable!"

"And then come back?"

"Come back! Never. I shall wait. People will come to take care of Sergius and Monsieur Jean Guyot! Let me see—" and she began to count the money she had taken. "Not much. Oh, if I only had my jewels!"

MacDougal emptied his pockets.

"Here is a hundred or so."

Olga drew back from his extended hand, asking—

"But why—what will you do?"

"I shall return for your jewels!"

She flashed to him a look of thanks and admiration, but asked—

"But if you are caught?"

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"If I am not caught perhaps I may be—rewarded!"

"You Americans! And I thought you were afraid. Before that I thought you were a scoundrel. I shot you for wanting to marry me!"

"I deserved death—then," MacDougal returned imperturbably.

"What can one say to you! You flirt with me when I want to be tragic! I heard Sergius and Jean Guyot talk of you. Sergius said you were a poor wastrel he had caught about to jump into the river, and that they had nothing to fear from you. No, they are afraid of that Rachel Sobetski, or Marie Lucka, as she is now called. Her husband is Paul Lucka. I know of him. Nihilist."

"What do they plan to do with me?" MacDougal asked.

"You—you are the Grand Duke Sergius' son! The Luckas are to believe that. Jean Guyot, a nihilist too, knows you are not Sergius' son, but he and Sergius plan to give you over to the Luckas as the son. Then they are to assassinate the Czar and all the heirs to the throne standing between it and Sergius. Don't you see? You are to be the hostage so that Sergius will make the promised reforms after he is Czar. The nihilists think that the idea originated with them. All the while it was being planned between Guyot and Sergius. Oh, they have a close understanding, those two. Guyot, indeed! If the nihilists only knew who he is—and he is their leader!"

"I can't believe that," MacDougal said, reflectively.

"Can't believe what? Why—why—what is your name?"

"Hugh MacDougal."

"Why, Monsieur Hugh, how can you believe anything else? Sergius picks you off the street and gives you money and a place in his house—why? Because he is kind of heart and you were cold and hungry? He would tell a hungry moujik to cut off his arm—the moujik's own arm, mind you—and eat it, rather than give him a kopeck for food! Better to trust a viper and let it nest in the glass from which you drink than to put faith in the Grand Duke Sergius!"

The fury with which she spoke left MacDougal rather doubtful, but he said:

"I'm going back. I promised to play the game as long as he was on the square. I don't doubt you," he added quickly, "but he hasn't yet really shown me that he wasn't playing square. Besides, you need your jewels."

Olga was puzzled. She looked at him half-angrily, half-admiringly.

"You mean to trust Sergius?"

"No, I mean to watch him—and trust you. What shall I do with the jewels?"

"Carry them with you and deliver them to whoever approaches you and says: 'You are foolish to trust me—but you must do it anyway.' It is always foolish to trust a stranger."

"We are no longer strangers," he replied, taking her hand.

Olga allowed him to press it to his lips, then she pulled away from him, got into the roadster and quickly demonstrated her familiarity with machines of the kind. She threw some words over her shoulder as she rolled away.

"I am sorry to go alone," she said.

VI

AS MacDOUGAL unlocked the door and started down the dark passageway alone he began to doubt the wisdom of the decision that was bringing him back. If he had gone with Olga he would not only have been far away from the grand duke's grasp, but he would also have been with her—that is to say, with the woman who had completely usurped his thoughts.

While it was incredible that the grand duke was aiming to assassinate his way to the throne, it was incomprehensible why he had picked a strange wastrel off the streets and pretended to consider him as a son if there was not some deep and probably diabolical plot in which the pseudo-son was to be pitilessly sacrificed. One look at the grand duke's shrewd, cruel face would assure any discerning person that he was not lacking the qualities which permit men to do cunning and bloody work.

MacDougal thought that he remembered about where the body of Guyot had been left, and he struck matches as he went along to avoid stumbling across it. Certainly it was impossible that he should have passed the body stretched across the passageway and not have seen it, but it was equally certain that he did not see it. Therefore, Guyot was gone!

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That was a surprising and disquieting discovery. Guyot had evidently worked his hands and feet loose and gone back to the grand duke.

MacDOUGAL'S deduction was correct. Guyot, whose head had struck against the wall, came out of his unconscious state and in a few moments remembered everything that had happened. It was not difficult to recall just what had taken place. He had stopped to light a cigaret. In the glare of the match he had perceived a woman—none other than the Countess Olga—then he had been hit.

Truly it was no woman's blow that had brought him down. Therefore it was some man's blow; and from some one whom she had introduced into the tunnel.

Guyot struggled with his hands—slim, hard, muscular hands they were—and soon had them free from the knots that Olga had tied with strips of her petticoat. With his hands free he removed the gag, and then untied his ankles.

He did not know how long he had been lying there, but judged that it was not long. He had no sooner run his hands into his pocket than he realized that it would be futile to attempt to pursue the countess and the man through the tunnel. They had taken his key. They would probably take his roadster. The only thing to do was to get out on the road in the grand duke's machine and intercept them.

Guyot ran down the tunnel and bursting through the secret door, exclaimed with surprising familiarity for one addressing a grand duke:

"Olga has escaped—get out your machine and cut them off on the road."

Sergius had leaped up when he saw the door open, and his amazement at the disheveled Guyot was almost as great as at the words which were shouted by Guyot.

"What do you mean, Olga has escaped?"

"She and some man waylaid me in the passageway there. Took my money and the key to the other door. My roadster is there—and all our plans will go—" Guyot was emphatic and profane in mentioning the destination of their plans.

"Who was the man?" The grand duke spoke portentously.

It would go ill for the man.

"I didn't see him at all clearly. But I think it was that son of yours," Guyot said sardonically.

"Jean!" There was a strange note in the grand duke's voice. "You know why it has been done?"

"Certainly I do. And now I suggest that you cut his throat and hers also—if we can catch them. Otherwise—plouie!"

He made a significant gesture with his hands.

"It could not have been he with Olga. How did she get there anyway?"

"Why couldn't it?"

"The only time they have met she shot him. I told her once when she was saying that she would never marry that she would marry my son—when he was found."

"Maybe I'll have something to say about that," Guyot said insolently, standing squarely before the grand duke and smiling by the simple and mirthless process of twisting his thin lips. "But you don't know how many times they have met. It is too late to get out on the road and cut them off if they have taken my roadster; but we will have to start some agents to look for them. I suppose I can run the risk of being seen with you this once and at this time of night. Women cause all the trouble in this world anyway.

"That infernal Rachel Sobetski didn't show up tonight as I told you. She has been upset ever since she met that MacDougal fellow, and I think that he was probably hoodwinking you when he said that somebody had sent him a note with her name on it. You're an easy mark in some ways. Are you sure this fellow MacDougal was not laying for you instead of you for him?"

"Jean! Don't talk that way to me!"

"How shall I talk? Like a nihilist to the brother of the Czar?" and the young man laughed scornfully.

"We can soon find out if my vagrant was Olga's companion. But, Jean, I think it is somebody from across the water. I have watched her closely, but I am afraid she has got word to Alexis. In which case the Czar knows it and is prepared."

"Let him prepare!"

"I'll have the machine brought around and then have Peter go up and see if this fellow MacDougal, as he calls himself, is in his room. We will have to get to the city and start a search and a watch. Do you think we will dare use that passageway again?"

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"If Alexis is after us—no. Otherwise, the tunnel is as good as ever."

"We must get the car out and see if MacDougal is in his room," the grand duke said as he arose and picked up his hat and gloves.

MACDOUGAL, a bit fearfully, had been listening through the door. He did not understand a word that was said, except that he caught his own name and surmised from the tone that they were suspicious of him. Besides, he knew that he was guilty and was afraid that Guyot had seen and recognized him.

But the desperate idea came to him that if he could get to his room and get into bed, then send for Peter, an alibi would be practically established. No one would believe that he could have passed out of the tunnel and reentered the house as quickly as he proposed doing when he saw—or rather heard—Guyot and Sergius leaving.

They were no sooner out of the room than MacDougal was through the door. They turned to the right and went toward the front of the house.

MacDougal turned to the left and raced toward the rear, taking the back stairs. He got to his room and had loosened his shoe-strings and was beginning to fumble one-handedly with the tie, for it was not only awkward to have but one arm to use but he had not dared to turn on the light, when a knock came at the door.

MacDougal's heart missed three or four beats; but while his heart was being remiss in its duty his legs were busily carrying him into still further complications. MacDougal sprang full-dressed into the bed, snuggled down deep in the covers, and as the knock was repeated said in the sleepiest voice he could command—

"Who is it?"

He fancied that he heard Guyot's voice making some surprised exclamation; but Peter, asking if he might come in, came in without waiting for a reply, pressed the button that lighted the bedroom, then said that he was sorry to disturb monsieur but his Excellency wished monsieur to remain in the house in the morning.

MacDougal grunted sleepily and appeared to doze off, pulling, however, the covers high over him as though to shut off the light.

Peter failed to notice that there was anything lacking—such as removed clothing—in the order of the bedroom; and withdrew.

At the foot of the stairs Guyot came to Sergius and said:

"You are right. It wasn't him. Then it must have been Alexis. And that means trouble and lots of it."

MACDOUGAL lay long a-bed, listening. When he was sure that the coast was clear he arose, undressed, slipped into his pajamas, then moved stealthily across the hall to the door of Olga's room.

He tried it. It was unlocked. He turned on a light because the light was the chance that he had to take, and was both thrilled and embarrassed by being in her room. It was easy to find the jewelry, for it was where she had told him to look. But as he took the case from the dressing-table his eye caught the photograph of a square-jawed, dashing, striking-faced, but scarcely handsome fellow in a brilliant military uniform. Scrawled across the edge of it was a sentence in English:

From yours eternally, Alexis.

Before he realized what he was doing, MacDougal had taken the photograph between his teeth to hold it, and with his left hand he tore it in two and flung the pieces on to the floor.

Then holding the casket of jewelry under his pajama blouse he slipped back across the hall to his own room.

VII

JEAN GUYOT was an enigma to the nihilists. In fact, though scarcely more than a youth there were times when he disputed with the leaders, even overrode them, so Paul and Marie Lucka regarded him as of pre-eminent importance. Paul Lucka had a long and notable record, and he was nominally at the head of the society; but of late years Guyot had acquired enormous influence with both Lucka and his wife.

Guyot was a rare combination of fire and ice. He was dynamic, intense, yet cool-headed and cold-blooded, cynical, ingenious and ever devising some scheme or other for the good of the society—even

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as he had proposed that if the grand duke would give his son into the keeping of the society as a hostage, the nihilists would assassinate all who stood between him and the throne. Then he would be required to make certain revolutionary reforms.

In a thousand ways Guyot had proved his usefulness and reliability; and Lucka trusted him implicitly. At times Guyot seemed to possess clairvoyant powers. When other sources of information failed he would often have a dream which would reveal that the Czar was about to make a secret journey to such and such a city over a certain road; or at other times he would have the premonition that the police were preparing to raid his retreat or to apprehend some prominent spy.

It was all very remarkable. But about the time that the Grand Duke Sergius was reported dead, though known by those of the inner circle to have been banished, Guyot's powers of clairvoyance became considerably diminished—so much so in fact that he, together with the Luckas were compelled to flee the country.

They had scarcely reached the United States when Guyot's remarkable faculty for discovering and planning things again became apparent. It was he, for instance, who discovered that the Grand Duke Sergius had not died, but had been banished and was devoting all of his time to the search for his son. It was Guyot who had told both Paul and Marie Lucka a week before the grand duke had discovered his son that he would discover him; and it was Guyot who had told Lucka that the grand duke would entertain a proposal to give his son as a hostage and finance the society in clearing the way to the throne for him.

Guyot denied flatly that he had ever seen the grand duke, much less had ever spoken to him; and placed the responsibility—or credit—for his familiarity with the grand duke's affairs to psychic dreams that came from time to time. He had no control over these dreams: they came without any regard to wishing for them, but they were always accurate.

Guyot had not attained to a place of importance among the nihilists without having his past carefully pried into. It appeared that he had been taken from a foundling asylum in Paris by an eccentric Frenchman who lived much alone. Some were of the opinion that the Frenchman was really an exiled Russian, for he had inculcated into Jean Guyot a hatred for the ruling class of Russia and had put him, at an early age, in touch with the revolutionary society.

What had become of this French-Russian no one knew, though he was reported to have been drowned. Another report said that he had committed suicide. Anyway, Peter Guyot—as he called himself—disappeared and Jean was left to inherit a modest fortune which had enabled him to give all of his time and a little of his money to the work of destroying autocracy.

GUYOT awoke in the morning after a futile search for Olga and the man of mystery who had assaulted him in the tunnel, and he was feeling unpleasant. He awoke because Paul Lucka was pounding on the door.

Guyot had an apartment across the hall from the Luckas in a three-story brick, cosmopolitan apartment-house, which was filled with revolutionary sympathizers and spies; but as the spies were all well known to the nihilist society it was thought well to leave them alone—much better than to drive them away and have other spies who would not be known come drifting back.

Lucka wore a Prince Albert coat, freshly pressed, and trousers with creases sharp as knife-blades, and he held his tall stiff hat carefully in his yellow-gloved hands. He was a striking and handsome man with long, slightly gray hair combed back from his forehead, which was high and broad, the nose straight and well-formed.

"What's the occasion for the splendor?" Guyot asked, sitting up in bed and rolling a cigaret.

"Have you forgotten? Today I go to ask Mr. Northdike if he will allow us to make him Czar of all the Russias!"

"The devil! I had forgotten." Guyot was thoughtful. "But don't address him as Northdike. Come right out, say Sergius. He'll know you know who he is."

"I would like to have you come with me."

"No," Guyot replied, "that would not do. He knows of you. Every one knows of you. No one has heard of me. And like the old senator of Rome, it is better that you should go alone on your mission than have a companion who would have

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to be introduced to those with whom you went to parley."

"Marie is afraid——"

"What is there to be afraid of?" Guyot asked testily.

"The unexpected. She spent a bad night."

"So did I," Guyot answered, touching his jaw gently and again wondering if he had been struck with a fist or a club.

"But I have told her that we have everything to gain and nothing to lose."

"Exactly. Nothing to lose. Not unless that infernal Alexis and some of the police agents come over here and begin making trouble for us."

"We can take care of him—first."

"Yes, yes," Guyot said slowly, thoughtfully, eying Lucka, "a very good idea, and it is just about time to begin. I am not sure but I believe that I met him last night face to face."

"Alexis! Where? It can't be."

"It was in a dark spot—I stopped to light a cigaret. I thought I saw him with a woman. I recognized her as the Countess Olga. I have seen her picture so many times. They say Alexis is insanely in love with her. I wonder if he would be so much so if the Czar should confiscate her estates? I wonder. I am going to put in the day looking for him."

"I wonder if he can be the man that attacked Marie last night? She came home terribly wrought up. She had had to use a dagger to defend herself."

"How did that happen?"

"She was in a restaurant when he came in and asked her to go to a private room with him. He called her by name, so she thought that he must be about business of the society. But they were no sooner in the room than he seized her by the throat and vowed that she must give up the roster of the society. She did not cry out. No. She drew a knife and flew at him, and when he cried out she stripped her coat and dropped her skirt—it's the ruse she always used in Russia, you remember, to escape the police—and fled."

"He wanted the roster of the society! That is Alexis! I must see Marie right away."

"She did not want to talk to me about it. I saw something was wrong. She was breathless and her cheeks were flushed. She was afraid it would worry me. And it does. But I got the story from her. I wanted to ask if you had any idea who this man could be. But you say you met Alexis last night. We must be on the lookout for him. Shall I tell the Grand Duke Sergius that Alexis is here?"

"By all means. They are deadly enemies. That's the only reason Olga loves him—Alexis, I mean. She hates Sergius so."

"You say that as though you really knew it was so," Lucka replied with pleasantry that did not conceal his surprise.

"You don't dream, Paul? Lucky man. My dreams are so vivid I can not tell when I awaken what is the memory of actual happenings and what is the whispering of fantasies that came to me in sleep. But I did not dream of my meeting with Alexis. No."

And Guyot again tenderly rubbed his fingers over his jaw.

LUCKA went out on his way to call on the Grand Duke Sergius; and Guyot arose and began hastily to dress for he had much questioning to carry on with Marie.

Twenty minutes after Lucka left Guyot was knocking on her door, but she did not answer. He rapped loudly, impatiently; but no sign of life came from the room. He ventured to try the door. It was unlocked. He peered inside. It was empty.

Guyot swore to himself and turned down the hallway just as a squat, thick-set man with a muffler draped about his face came up the stairway and stood peering about indecisively.

"What do you want?" Guyot snapped.

The man drew back, his black eyes glistened, and the muffler slipped slightly down, disclosing a long deep scar.

"Lucka? He here? She here?"

"The devil!" said Guyot to himself, recognizing him as the chauffeur of Sergius. Then aloud: "Were you sent for them?"

Feodor did not know just what that question implied, but it seemed safe to answer in the affirmative: that would give him an excuse for being there, and it seemed that an excuse was needed since this tall, thin, fierce-looking man was suspicious of him.

"Yes," he replied.

Guyot did not doubt him; but he thought that Sergius must have suddenly

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lost his mind to send for the Luckas when the whole fulcrum of the plot, so to speak, depended on their making the first overtures and going of their own volition—or apparently of their own free will—to Sergius with the proposal to make him Czar and take his son as hostage.

"Did Sergius send you—the grand duke?" Guyot snapped angrily.

It obviously would not be agreeable to admit that Sergius had sent him. So Feodor shook his head.

"Who did?" Guyot was relieved on one score only to be more puzzled and agitated on another.

Feodor saw that he had become involved. He could not now admit that no one had sent him. The responsibility must be placed on some one. There were but three people who had the right to give him orders: Sergius, Peter and the grand duke's son.

"His Excellency's son," said Feodor.

Guyot swore in French and at length. He furiously told Feodor to get out—told it to him in French, in Russian and in English, told it to him by word and gesture: told him to get out and stay out. And Feodor stayed not upon the order of his going, but, seeing that he had evidently made the worst possible answer, fled precipitately; and was filled with wonder that this stranger should have known at the first glance that he came from the Grand Duke Sergius' household.

But his amazement was insignificant beside that of the infuriated Guyot's. There was something decidedly wrong with that MacDougal. The preposterous impudence of the fellow to send for the Luckas! What could it mean? What on earth could it mean? If MacDougal had not been found sleeping in his bed, Guyot would have sworn that the fellow in the tunnel was none other than this same MacDougal. But not even the devil himself could be in two places at once. And if it was not MacDougal in the tunnel with Olga, then it must have been Alexis, that diabolical captain of the palace guard.

It must have been Alexis who approached Marie and demanded the roster of the society. Alexis knew that she was Rachel Sobetski. Few people knew it. Guyot had known it for a long time, and held that knowledge in reserve against the time when he might need something to coerce her.

The plans of the carefully wrought plot were becoming strangely tangled, and Guyot could not imagine why.

He was baffled in trying to figure out how to go about untwisting the tangle. He wanted to get to Sergius and have a long talk with him. It would certainly go ill with that fellow MacDougal! The audacity and folly and madness of the fellow to send Sergius' chauffeur for the Luckas!

But Guyot did not know how to go about getting in touch with Sergius. There was a telephone—but for peculiar reasons he did not dare attempt to use it.

Nor did he dare risk entering the tunnel. He was sure that the entrance would be watched by Alexis, or whoever it was that Olga had succeeded in enlisting, and they would like nothing better than to catch him. It might be that the watchers knew that he had left the house. It might be that they knew who he was. That would be bad for the plot. He wanted no one to know of his secret relation with Sergius. He did not dare telephone for he himself had suggested—with Sergius' knowledge and consent—that the telephone wire to Sergius' house be tapped and somebody was kept continually on watch listening to all messages that went over the wire.

Guyot roundly cursed the precaution that he had taken: a precaution originally adopted to prevent the Luckas and others of the society from ever growing suspicious that he was in secret communication with Sergius. He had been afraid that some one might grow suspicious when he, Guyot, suggested that the society make the proposal of taking the son as a hostage and putting Sergius on the throne. No one would ever think of the tunnel as a means of communication. They would credit all of Guyot's plans to his dreams and natural cunning.

But now, when he was most in need of it, Guyot found himself completely cut off from communication with Sergius.

He came near risking the tunnel again, but if he should happen to be caught, then the whole plot—the plotting of a lifetime; one might say the plotting of two men's lifetimes would be blasted. The hazard was too great to be taken.

Guyot could only fume nervously and wonder what had become of Marie? Who was that mysterious man if not Alexis, and if Alexis, where on earth was he to be found? How had Olga got in communication with

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the outside? Why had that gutter-loafer of a MacDougal, that wastrel snatched back from the brink of the river, that poor bum, dared to meddle in the affairs of Sergius to such an extent that he would send Sergius' own chauffeur for the Luckas? And what could he possibly want with them? How did he know there were such people as the Luckas?

It was incomprehensible; and too late Guyot realized that he had made a mistake in driving off that chauffeur instead of closely questioning and encouraging him to talk.

MARIE LUCKA was on the verge of consternation. She had been on the verge of consternation all night, and while Guyot was looking for her she was driving madly in a taxi for the home of the Grand Duke Sergius. She knew that her husband would follow her; but she was determined to be there first, to see the grand duke first and if possible prevent him from accepting the proposal that her husband was coming to make.

That man—reputed to be the grand duke's son—must be kept from her husband.

She knew that Lucka would cut her throat and with her own blood write the record of the deed in the society's journal if he learned that she was Rachel Sobetski!

That man must be kept from any member of the society. If he were given to the society as a hostage he would be almost certain to reveal her secret. He would want the society to succeed with its plans and make his father Czar, and of course he would warn Lucka that she was the notorious Rachel Sobetski who had, a decade before, mystified the nihilists while giving away their inner secrets to the police.

The police did not know that she was Marie Lucka. The nihilists did not know that she was Rachel Sobetski. Since her marriage to Lucka she had been faithful to the society; and she had believed that the dreaded secret was buried forever.

She must at any cost keep the grand duke's son from her husband.

With a daring entirely characteristic of her, she had lured him to the restaurant and tried to murder him. She had thought that he was dead. She had thought so when she fled because there was no outcry, no pursuit.

When she had dropped from the fire-escape into the alley she had waited a moment to listen, and finding that there was no commotion she had smiled to herself with satisfaction, and pictured the alarm and flurry that would agitate the place in a few minutes when the waiter came in and found the dead body.

Feeling perfectly secure in her disguise, one that she had used effectively many times in Russia, she had gone around the block and waited across the street from the restaurant entrance, expecting to see the ambulance soon come rolling down the street and bear away the lifeless body of the man who, from some incomprehensible source, had possessed her secret.

Her heart melted within her and her knees waggled as though made of warm rubber when she saw the man, apparently none the worse for her knife-thrusts, walk out of the entrance, get into the waiting machine and drive off.

She went back to her apartment, determined at least to keep the fellow out of the way even if she could not kill him; but wondering how it would be possible to do so.

Her agitation was so apparent that her husband noticed it, and she improvised the story that he had repeated to Guyot.

During a sleepless night she had considered a hundred plans, and finally resolved on the most desperate because it seemed to be the only one that might be effective. She knew that Lucka was, that same morning, going to make his proposal to the grand duke. She must get to the grand duke first. And as soon as Lucka stepped into Guyot's room she rushed from the apartment, got into a taxi and drove as fast as a chauffeur, made reckless by a princely bonus, dared to go.

Sergius, of course, was aware that he was to be approached that morning with a proposal by the nihilist leader. Peter was also aware of it; and Peter was not only on the lookout, but the gate which had been kept continually locked, barring entrance to the grounds, was thrown open so the expected visitor could drive in without delay.

Peter saw the taxi coming and opened the door as soon as it came up the driveway. He was not expecting a woman, and he came near telling her that she had made a mistake and closing the door in her face.

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But Marie sprang out of the taxi, pushed her way into the house past the astonished Peter and said:

"Your master—his Excellency—I must see him at once. It is a matter of life and death!"

Peter saw that she knew of whom she was talking, and though he did not know her by sight he suspected that she was one of the nihilists; though it might be that she had been sent by Olga.

"Your name, madam? And the nature of your business?"

"My name and business alike," she said sharply, "are for the Grand Duke Sergius. Not for his valet!"

Peter bowed low and imperturbably, then assumed a respectful attitude of waiting.

"Quick, man! I must see the grand duke."

"Your name, madam? And the nature of your business?" he repeated calmly.

Marie feared to reveal her identity to a servant. Both nihilists and the police obtain most of their information from servants. And precious moments were being lost by this fellow's obstinacy.

"Take me to his Excellency, sir!"

"Impossible. The Grand Duke Sergius does not see strangers who have no name."

Marie saw that she was beaten. She surrendered, and answered boldly—

"Marie, wife of Lucka the nihilist!"

"Indeed?" Peter replied politely, but his bland face did not wholly conceal the new interest in her. "And the occasion for this unusual honor, madam?"

"The grand duke's son. I came to tell his Excellency something of importance concerning him."

"Come with me," Peter said.

"Here—" and Marie very nearly emptied her purse in offering a gift to Peter. "And there will be more—much more—if no one learns of my visit."

"No one shall unless you speak of it," Peter answered, pretending not to see the extended bribe. "Follow me, please."

SERGIUS paced to and fro in his subterranean office and was much troubled in mind while he waited for Lucka. He was greatly disturbed by the escape of Olga, and even more by the fact that she and some man who might be Alexis, had discovered the secret passageway. He had shut himself off with the least possible number of confederates, having no one in his confidence but Peter and Jean Guyot, both of whom could be trusted.

But this isolation now had disadvantages that Sergius would have given much to overcome. He was shut off from communication with Guyot since the tunnel was known to his enemies; and he could not communicate with a detective agency over the telephone because that was tapped, and he could not himself leave or spare Peter until after Lucka had come on his exceedingly important visit.

Things were going badly, but he could not drop his plans. Too many years had been spent in building them up. For over a quarter of a century he had known what he was about, and like a wizard at a chess game he had made moves and sacrifices with a calculating eye and reduced, or thought he had reduced, his chances of failure to the vanishing-point.

His door was open, and as he heard steps in the hall he quickly sat down at his desk to appear composed and later to appear surprised when Lucka should announce that he knew him as the grand duke.

Peter announced—

"Madam Lucka," and bowed her in.

Marie was hard pressed for time. She flung herself at the grand duke without formal preliminary.

Peter withdrew, closing the door, more to assure her that he was not eavesdropping than for any precaution against her being overheard.

"Your Excellency," she cried, "the life of your son is in danger! Don't give him up to the nihilists—no matter what promises they make you. My husband will be here in a few minutes. He must not know I have been here. But I have come to warn you. There is a member of the society who has sworn to murder your son! I tell you this because our plans must succeed. You want to be Czar and we want to make you Czar—" Marie was forgetting that Sergius was not supposed to know anything about the plan, and Sergius was forgetting the same thing—"but if your son is murdered as soon as he becomes our hostage everything will be ruined!"

"What do you mean?" Sergius cried,

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angry and puzzled at this new difficulty in his scheme of things.

But Marie misunderstood. She explained:

"My husband will be here in a minute to propose that you give your son to the nihilists as a guarantee of reform for Russia, and they will make you Czar. My husband is honest, but his best friend—the man who suggested the plan—is your bitter enemy and I know that he intends to murder your son just as soon as he can lay his hands on him. He would rather have his vengeance than see the nihilists with a friend on the throne! He made the plan solely to get your son in his hands! My husband does not believe it, but it is true! I have heard this man talking in his sleep. He gloats over it in his sleep. His apartment is next to ours."

"His name?" Sergius demanded with rising suspicion.

"Jean Guyot!"

Sergius turned away and tugged savagely at his beard.

The woman seemed honest. She said she wished for the success of the plot. Sergius knew that she had formerly been a traitor to the nihilists, but there was no suspicion of treachery here. Jean had particular reasons for having such dreams as she had claimed—so to speak—to overhear. Possibly Jean did talk aloud in his sleep. Here was another wretched complication. He could not assure this woman that Jean Guyot was to be trusted; and there was no evidence that she was not sincere in hoping that the proposed plot would succeed.

Lucka himself, she went on to say, had put no stock in the dreams, which was sensible, but she had come to warn Sergius of the danger that she foresaw. From her point of view she was right. If the so-called son should be killed by some crazy revolutionary then the plot would fall through. The nihilists would fear that Sergius on the throne would be their bitterest enemy to repay them for the murder; and they would not aid him without another hostage of importance equal to his son. And such another hostage was not procurable. But Sergius knew that the woman's fears were unfounded.

What he did not know, however, was that she was as well aware of that as himself. He did not suspect that she was playing a deep game of her own accord, and he did not want to offend her in any way, and he did not dare let her know that she had nothing to fear from Guyot—at least, not what she thought.

"Of course," he said, "this is all surprising to me. I might say incomprehensible. Am I to understand that the nihilists are going to suggest to me that they will assassinate all who stand between myself and the throne if I promise certain reforms? And they will require my son—my long-lost son who has only very recently been restored to his father's arms—as a hostage?"

"Don't give him up! Please. Not until we can make other arrangements. We must succeed!" She spoke tensely, but low, pleading earnestly.

Sergius stood for a long time in thought.

Before he spoke, Peter rapped on the door.

"What is it?" Sergius cried out, for the door was thick.

Peter answered—

"Monsieur Lucka!"

"My husband!" she whispered in consternation. "He must not know I am here! He must not! Hide me. Let me get away. I came to serve you and him—and he will be terribly angry. I did what I thought was best. Save me!"

Sergius understood. As exasperated as he was at the woman's interference, he nevertheless could not blame her. Above all things he must avoid letting the society have an internal quarrel, such as was bound to follow if Lucka found out why his wife was there and the two of them began a dispute over Guyot.

"Is he with you?" Sergius asked, stepping closer to the door.

"Right here, your Excellency!" Peter evidently thought that if the wife knew who Sergius was that there was no reason pretending that he was a Mr. Northdike before the husband.

Sergius sprang to his desk, and pointing across the room, said in a low voice—

"Quick—get in there!"

The secret door swung back, and Marie darted through it.

Sergius opened the door of his room, and as he met Lucka said:

"Pardon me, monsieur, but I was not expecting company this morning, and I needed to keep you waiting until I could

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get into my coat. It would be impossible to receive so distinguished a visitor as Monsieur Paul Lucka in one's shirt-sleeves."

VIII

MARIE sank against the wall to catch her breath. She did not like being alone in the dark at any time, and was particularly uneasy now because she did not have the faintest idea as to where she was. Moreover, it was very mysterious to be shoved through a secret door that opened out of the side of the room, and left in abysmal darkness: that is, abysmal except for a slender pencil of light that streamed through an almost invisible hole. She put her eye to the hole, but could see nothing. Then she put her ear to it, and was just congratulating herself on the good fortune of being able to overhear the entire conversation, when Sergius invited Lucka to accompany him up to the library. And they went out.

Sergius was taking him where she could not hear. Supposing that he asked about Guyot? Marie's blood ran cold at the thought. He might not reveal to her husband what she had said, but Sergius would certainly be suspicious, if not convinced, that she had brought him a story made of whole cloth.

Marie heard, or thought she heard, a sound behind her.

She turned quickly and gasped in fright—

"Who's there?"

No answer came. She listened intently, but there was nothing but silence, so she almost persuaded herself that her imagination had been too acute.

Then again she heard the sound: a footstep, light, cautious, but one that had made a slight miscalculation in the dark and scraped on the cement.

"Who is it?" Marie screamed.

No answer.

"Who are you?" Marie asked in a panicky whisper, staring terrified into the blackness.

"I know who you are," came a vibrant, low, musical voice. "I heard all that you said to Sergius!"

Marie did not know whether to feel relieved or the more frightened by the discovery that the unknown speaking to her out of the dark was a woman; but she knew it was terrible that a stranger had heard all that she said to the grand duke. And yet, if that stranger was in the passageway opening from his room, she must, so Marie swiftly reasoned, be in his confidence.

"Why," demanded the voice out of the darkness, "did you come to Sergius with that story when you, yourself, tried to kill that young man last night?"

Marie felt like one who slips over a precipice, and she clutched frantically at whatever might save her.

"That is why I ran such a risk to save him today! I did not try to kill him last night. I only pretended to. I was driven to do it. I would have been killed myself. And I came to tell the grand duke that story so he would keep his son safe."

"Who drove you to do it? Guyot?"

"Yes, Guyot.. He is a dreadful man."

"How could he make you do a thing like that? Why didn't you tell your husband?"

"That's just what he threatened to do!" Marie cried. "He has discovered my lover and threatens to tell my husband if I do not do as he says. Guyot says that I must kill the grand duke's son. He was watching me last night. He thinks that I really tried to kill him. But I didn't. I scarcely hurt him. Why, he walked out of the restaurant and nobody knew he had even been attacked. I wouldn't hurt anybody."

A moment of tense silence, then Marie was again placed on guard by the question:

"But you want Sergius' plot to succeed? That will mean the murder of at least nine people."

"I do not! I do not!" Marie answered passionately. "I opposed the plan all along. It is Guyot's. I did not want it even suggested to the grand duke. But my husband insisted. He has come just now to make the proposal to him."

She had perceived both by the tone and the words that her questioner disapproved of Sergius and the plot.

"Do you think you nihilists are suggesting that to Sergius! You dupes! It was he who suggested it to you!"

"Impossible!" Marie answered with conviction.

"Impossible? And what if I should prove it true? What if I should prove that this boy is not his son, but a poor young man who was about to drown himself, and Sergius saw a chance to pass him off to you nihilists as a hostage. Why should Guyot want you to kill him?"

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"Oh, he is sure that this is the grand duke's son!"

"He is sure that he is not! I stood at that door last night and heard Guyot and Sergius laughing over the way they had tricked you nihilists."

Marie was really terrified. Here were undreamed-of complications.

"I can't believe it," she replied weakly.

But she did believe it. There was something about the voice of the other woman that convinced.

"Sergius and your husband have gone out, haven't they? I could tell that they had by the look on your face. There is a little stream of light and your face was in that. Now, open that door and step out, and I will convince you. Be careful, for I have an automatic here."

Marie cautiously opened the door, and there followed her a tall, beautiful girl with delicate features and blazing dark eyes. Marie was astonished at the beauty of the stranger.

"Who are you?" she asked again.

"Hold that door open. I don't know how to open it if it closes. I came for some papers here. It was a fearful chance, but it is coming out all right."

Olga searched through the desk and quickly plundered the cabinet, scattering papers recklessly, and gleaning here and there something that she appeared to want especially.

When she had collected a small sheaf she reentered the door and turning on a pocket flashlight said:

"Now come with me. I have a car waiting at the other end and we will soon be far away, and I will show you what Sergius has been up to. We had best be good friends, you and I, for he will think you have stolen his papers; besides, as soon as he sees Guyot again he will find out that you have lied."

Marie could not answer. She felt that she had clutched vainly to save herself, and had fallen over the precipice.

IN THE library Lucka, chief of the nihilist society, and Sergius, brother to the Czar, were sitting with a table between them and preserving an attitude of mutual respect and attentiveness.

"To some minds it may seem a terrible and cruel way of attaining our ends," Lucka was saying earnestly, his strong face illuminated with the zealot's fervor. "But think of the bloodshed that these few deaths will prevent! Russia runs blood. The autocracy is blind and unreasoning. You, a grand duke, have been banished because, I believe, of certain liberal opinions."

Sergius bowed in modest acknowledgment.

"For my part, I would take your pledged word as sufficient guarantee of the reforms with which you would grace the throne when you came to it. But unfortunately our society is composed of many more distrustful than myself, and that is why I suggest that you give into our care your son until such time as you have fulfilled the expectations of those who are willing to risk their lives to fulfil your destiny.

"He will be given the most solicitous care and attention, for I am fully aware what a sacrifice it would be for you to surrender to the hereditary enemies of your house and caste a son but lately restored, after long and painful absence, to your arms."

Again Sergius bowed. Also he sighed, apparently shaken by deep emotion.

"Of course, your son will be made familiar with the situation, and will no doubt be glad to do his share; though, being of your noble blood, he will be irked that his share is so passive and lacking in dangers."

"As you have said," Sergius replied, "I was banished from Russia by my own brother because I presumed to protest against the injustices which he perpetuated. So shameful was my action considered that it was given out that I was dead. All of my estates were confiscated, and but for the loyalty of the Countess Olga, I would have been impoverished. I devoted all of my time to the search for my son, and at last that search was rewarded; and I had happily decided to settle down in quiet obscurity and spend the remainder of my days in study. I have no ambitions. Who takes up ambition, takes up fearful responsibility.

"The man who is Czar of Russia, if he has an interest in the good of his poor country, must be harassed and sorely tried. But I love my country! Duty calls me. And to save a hundred million people from the perpetual curse of despotism, we must moisten our fingers in the blood of the rulers. I accept, Monsieur Lucka! This

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is the most solemn moment of my life—and I accept with a full realization of the awful responsibilities that will come upon me, and I will be faithful to your trust in me and raise my country to be one of the enlightened nations of the earth!"

Very solemnly the two men rose to their feet and across the table shook hands. Sergius' face was drawn and tense with determination. Lucka's eyes were filled with tears of emotion.

Lucka, who had a strong dramatic instinct, was ready to leave; but Sergius, who could not let the success of his plan be impaired by an esthetic feeling for dramaturgy, began talking again and as a kind of anti-climax explained that he did not think it best for his son to know that they were playing for the throne of Russia, or even that he was being lodged among nihilists.

"As you have said, monsieur, he is a boy who would not willingly keep out of danger if he knew what was being done. He would want to be in the thick of it. He could not understand why you would need more than my word to guarantee your reforms; and he is so hot-headed and reckless that I fear he might cause some misapprehension among your friends.

"And I do not think it wise that he should know that he is being kept as the guest of nihilists. He would ask questions. That would seem so incomprehensible to him that he would be suspicious and unsatisfied with any explanation that could be made.

"No. I think it best that he know nothing. I will merely tell him that you are a dear friend of mine, and that as he and I must again be separated for a time, he will be your guest. He will not think anything of that. I have already prepared him for a separation, and even as much as we both regret it, he understands that it is necessary for a time. But if he knew that it was because I was climbing to a throne instead of being concerned in financial affairs, he would not willingly leave my side.

"So I must ask you not to let him become aware of the secret, or to allow him to discover that he is being entertained by nihilists."

Lucka replied that that was rather unexpected and would be rather difficult, too; but it was after all not too much to ask, and that he thought it could be arranged.

Then Peter was instructed to call MacDougal, and when he came into the library he was introduced to Lucka, a very close friend of his father.

MacDougal was less at his ease than he appeared. He assumed the part expected of him, spoke respectfully, and listened attentively. He smiled confirmingly when Sergius explained the accident that had disabled the arm, and he kept his other hand in his coat pocket—where the jewels of Olga's were secreted.

Also he kept his eyes on Lucka, and wondered deeply what could possibly be the understanding between these men, for he recognized Lucka as one of the men he had seen in the restaurant that day when he first encountered Marie, or as he had known her then, Rachel Sobetski. And in the passageway he had recognized Guyot as the other man—the one whom Lucka accompanied.

WHEN MacDougal withdrew and left the two men to their parting, he asked Peter if it would be all right to take the car and go to town. Peter, who seemed to be singularly familiar with the grand duke's wishes and plans said it would perhaps be better to wait till Monsieur Lucka had gone.

Monsieur Lucka did not depart in haste, but he and Sergius stood in the hallway for some time chatting with intimate friendliness. Sergius had said that it would be several days before he could arrange for the separation from his son; and there was no way for Lucka to know that Sergius was asking for time to get into communication with Guyot again and also to locate Olga.

But Lucka at last left, and MacDougal asked for the car which Peter ordered brought around; but before MacDougal could get away the grand duke appeared in the hallway. He was storming like a madman. His black eyes were inflamed with anger, his face was twisted with passion and furious oaths streamed from his lips. He stamped about the hall, raging, flinging his fists about, snatching at the portières and jerking them down, kicking furniture that chanced to be in his path, and acting like a man that had escaped Bedlam.

Peter, the bland, immobile Peter, turned ashen and seemed about to faint, whether

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from fright at the grand duke's rage or because of what the grand duke was saying in Russian, MacDougal did not know.

"Tricked by a traitorous, treacherous woman!" Sergius was crying. "She is an agent of Alexis! I could swear it. Rachel Sobetski! I was a fool to listen to her. My papers—everything—they are gone! Gone, do you hear! If she gets them to Lucka, I am ruined. If she gets them to Alexis, I am ruined! Our whole plan, Peter—she has it! Why did you let her get in? Why didn't you shut the door in her face? I hid her in the passageway to keep her husband from seeing her, and she plundered my papers! Do you think it could have been a plot between her and her husband? Have they fooled Jean and made a dupe of us? I must find her—Peter—dead or alive. I must find her at once. Dead preferred, Peter, dead."

Then noticing MacDougal, he shouted in English:

"What are you doing here? Going out again? Get to your room and stay there. Don't leave this house again. How do I know you are not in league with Rachel Sobetski? Somebody is."

MacDougal did not know what the trouble was, but he very much resented having it suspected that he was in league with Rachel Sobetski—of all people! When the grand duke said that, MacDougal came back with a sharp, graphic description of the encounter.

He concluded:

"I was ashamed of having been trapped and made a fool. I dressed myself as best I could so Peter wouldn't know. Why that woman wants to kill me, I can not imagine. But I suspect that you can!"

The amazement of both Peter and the grand duke left both in silence for some seconds.

The grand duke saw that he had been completely hoodwinked by her story, but he did not entirely believe MacDougal's.

MacDougal did not know what all the commotion was over, but in the course of his remarks he said that he believed that that woman had watched him every day, and that she seemed determined to follow him until she had killed him.

That was a remark that gave the grand duke an idea. He was badly hampered by a lack of trustworthy agents. When he brought MacDougal into the house and warned him that his movements would be watched and reported, Sergius was not bluffing. He had depended on Guyot to do the watching and reporting. Now he had no one to watch and report to him—unless he could make use of MacDougal.

It seemed incredible that the woman, Rachel Sobetski, or Marie Lucka, would have come as she had come that morning to protest against allowing MacDougal to be given up to the nihilists if she herself was determined to kill him. Evidently what she feared was that the nihilists would protect him, and that she would not be able to kill him without some one discovering who had done it.

The Grand Duke Sergius was keen-brained. He remembered that from some unknown source MacDougal had been informed that she was Rachel Sobetski and had let her know that he knew it. Both Sergius and Guyot were aware that she was the infamous Rachel Sobetski, but they had not imagined that in America was any other person who knew it.

Again the grand duke's mind went to Alexis. Alexis knew. Perhaps Alexis had watched MacDougal and had sent in that note. It was a disturbing thought. There was no evidence, no concrete evidence that Alexis was in America—but who, if not Alexis, could have helped Olga to escape, and who could have been the man in the passageway? Could it be that this woman, Rachel, had been pressed again into Alexis' service? Olga perhaps knew of the papers in the cabinet. She had told Alexis. Alexis had bribed or terrified Rachel into being his agent; and she, knowing that her husband was coming to him, Sergius, that morning had been inspired to play her game as she had played it.

But no one of them knew MacDougal was not his son: Sergius was sure of that.

They would be interested in MacDougal, continue to follow him, watch, and perhaps approach him.

He said:

"I have many bitter enemies who are attacking you because they hate me. But I know you are a brave man. I know you are loyal. Peter, go up to the countess' room and bring down that photograph of Alexis."

As Peter left, he continued to MacDougal:

"I want you to drive from here slowly to the city, give any one who wishes to a

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chance to follow you. Then go into a café, any prominent café, and wait. If this woman you know as Rachel Sobetski approaches you, say to her: 'You have robbed the bait from a trap that the grand duke set for bigger game, and the only way that you can keep Monsieur Lucka from learning who you really are is to return the papers at once.'

"You have seen the countess? Yes. You remember her well enough. If she speaks to you, say: 'You can make what protests and explanations you please to the Czar, but he will confiscate your estates when he learns that for some years their revenue has been diverted by you to Sergius. But if you return, your estates will be secured to you'."

Peter came down with the pieces of the photograph that MacDougal had torn.

Sergius looked at them, frowned thoughtfully, and remarked—

"I knew she never cared for him, but I did not suppose she would tear up his picture when he was helping her—er—to carry out certain crazy plans.

"But here, look at this carefully. And if this man comes near you, smile, and say: 'Monsieur, the Grand Duke Sergius conveys his compliments, and having consulted an astrologer, wishes me to inform you that it is written in the stars that if you do not take the first boat for Europe, a knife will suddenly take root between your ribs.' Can you remember all that?"

"Not certainly," MacDougal replied. "But permit me to write it down, and in a few minutes I will have it committed to memory."

"Do so. I will repeat it for you. Come into the library. I will write it myself. You are not left-handed, are you?"

MacDougal remembered that he was not.

Sergius wrote the three statements out carefully, and handed them to MacDougal, saying—

"Succeed with this, and—well, I will change the plans that affect the destiny of nations in a manner fittingly to reward you!"

IX

WHEN Olga and Marie came out of the passageway, a taxi was waiting for them. Olga had discarded the roadster for fear that its loss might have been reported to the police and Sergius would be able to get track of her on pretext of having Guyot report the machine as stolen—which, as a matter of fact, it had been.

Marie, even before they had reached the taxi, had decided to pretend to believe—though she was confident that she would not believe any such thing—that Sergius had made dupes of the nihilists, and having devised a plot to make himself Czar of Russia, made them conceive themselves to have been the originators of it. But in spite of preconceived ideas, Marie soon found herself convinced.

Then she was in doubt as to what she ought to do: whether to rush to her husband and let him know what she had found; whether to return to Sergius and try to win his favor by warning him; or whether to cast her fortune with Olga whom she suspected of being an agent of the Czar.

The course that paid the best was always the most tempting to Marie, for she loved the things that money buys.

But tentatively, until she could decide what else would profit her more, she pretended to be grateful to Olga, and to desire her protection and assistance.

"I did not know Paul Lucka was a nihilist when I married him," she said. "He deceived me. And because I was his wife I was suspected of being a nihilist, so I just became one in spite of myself. I was afraid to leave him. He is terribly cruel. I don't want to go back to him."

Marie was on the verge of tears.

"You have no real friends among the nihilists, then?" Olga asked as she busily assorted the papers brought away with her.

"Not one! I hate them all!"

"That is good. Sergius had a list of almost every nihilist in Russia, and his address—every one of importance."

Marie raised her head in astonishment.

"There's only one such list in existence!" she cried. "The inner council has it—in cipher."

Olga smiled.

"Guyot's a member of the inner council, isn't he?"

"He is—but—but—he's the most fiery and murderous of the society. He has always taken desperate chances——"

"He had nothing to fear."

"You mean he is a police agent?"

"No. But Sergius has influence in Russia, though he is banished. Guyot and

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Sergius are very close. But I have the list of the nihilists—here!"

She held up the paper.

"It will mean the death of hundreds of people!"

"They deserve to die," Olga replied with the bitterness of a born royalist. "But Sergius will think that you have taken it. That is what amuses me."

"Who are you?" Marie asked it with that subtle attitude of awe and admiration that artfully flatters, and often draws ill-advised confidences from the unwary.

"Who am I?" Olga returned craftily. "I am the only friend you have right now. Sergius can not be convinced that you have not stolen his papers and he will tell Guyot. Guyot will tell your husband about your lover—if not about the way you are supposed to have duped Sergius. The nihilists will draw their knives against you. You stay with me until a friend that I sent a cable to arrives, and I will see that you are taken care of the rest of your life. My friend may wish to ask you a few questions when he comes. Will you answer them?"

"Oh, yes, yes indeed."

Marie spoke with every effort to be convincing; but she was frantic in her own mind, so hard it was for her to decide what she ought to do.

"Who is the friend?" she asked, more for conversation than for information.

"I doubt if you know him. A captain of the palace guard."

"Alexis!" Marie guessed.

"Alexis? How do you know that?" Olga demanded.

"I met him last night," Marie exclaimed, scarcely aware of what she was saying, but always ready to lie if it served her purpose, and sometimes when it did not.

"Last night! Here? I can't believe it."

Olga questioned and Marie, committed to the lie, answered as best she could with the aid of her imagination.

When they arrived at the quiet little obscure hotel where Olga had put up, they got out together and went in. Marie was still bolstering her lie; and ready to swear that she had been perfectly honest in mistaking some one else for Alexis in case it later should be proved that she could not possibly have met him.

But as they went in a cablegram was handed to Olga.

She tore it open, read it at a glance, and handed it to Marie, saying:

"I did not believe you. But Alexis is here. Read this!"

The message read:

"Alexis left for New York three weeks ago. Address unknown."

"My God!" Marie said, as the paper fluttered from her hand.

Marie feared Alexis more than any living person. He was not only a bold, brutal, cunning fellow, endowed with tremendous courage, but Alexis was the man to whom she had sold the nihilists' secrets under the name of Rachel Sobetski. The nihilists all feared him: ostensibly an officer in the Czar's household, they knew that he was a very influential and active figure in the secret police, and that he had been able to leave Russia some three weeks ago without any word of it being conveyed to the nihilists in this country showed how carefully he had planned his departure.

"What's the matter?" Olga asked. "You knew he was here. You saw him, didn't you?"

"Yes. But how did you find this out? I told my husband and he wouldn't believe me."

"I have ways of finding some things. What makes you so pale? You have nothing to fear. Listen to me. I can't go out on the streets much, and there is a man I want to meet. I forgot to make an appointment with him, but I have engaged a detective agency to notify me when he goes into a café. He has a little package for me. You tried to stab him last night——"

"Oh," Marie exclaimed.

"And it will be a chance for you to explain to him and to do me a service. I will tell you what to say to him for me, and you can say what you wish for yourself."

"He isn't the grand duke's son?"

"No. Sergius has a son, or rather he had one that disappeared when a child. Kidnaped they say. But this isn't he. He is very much my friend—" Marie was busy with her own thoughts, but she was under the impression that Olga blushed slightly—"and I can't meet him. Will you meet him for me? And tell him to telephone me?"

Marie promised.

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HUGH, bearing a message to three different people from the grand duke, and not knowing how to get in touch with any one of them, drove about for some time before selecting a café. It was rather late for lunch, but it was not lunch that he wanted. He was hoping that he had been followed, and was just a little bit fearful of what might happen if he again encountered that woman who had tried to stab him.

He had made no arrangement for meeting Olga again, and had not the least expectation that chance would throw them together. He was feeling disappointed over that, though he tried to convince himself that it was solely because he wished to keep his promise and give her the jewels. He believed that she would need the money that could be raised from them. But he could not disguise from himself the fact that he wished to see her again because he could not get tender thoughts of her out of his mind. He loved her. He knew it, though he tried not to admit it.

When he got out of the machine he told Feodor that he did not know how long he would be; but probably that he would be gone for some time.

MacDougal went into the café and sat down not far from the door where any one could see him at once upon entering.

He took his time with the luncheon, not because he was hungry, but because he expected to remain for an hour or more; and sent out for a paper which he read leisurely.

Few people were in the café. Now and then some one came in for a late lunch. But none seemed to notice him.

If MacDougal's ears could have caught what was being said of him over the telephone in the booth across the street, or if he could have heard what was being said to Feodor out on the curb, he would not have felt quite so hopeless about getting in touch with the people to whom the grand duke had delegated him to carry messages.

Feodor had climbed down off his seat to stretch his legs when a tall, muscular man with heavy lips and a thick, bulging jaw came up. His was not a handsome, but certainly a forceful face.

He touched Feodor on the shoulder.

The chauffeur wheeled, and saluted respectfully as he stepped back.

"So that wife of yours is still alive," the man said scornfully, and without a preliminary word of any kind.

"I have searched for her, sir," Feodor replied humbly, speaking in Russian.

"So have I. The nihilists are up to some new devilment, and I expect her to tell me what it is, or I shall tell that new husband of hers who she is. And by the way, it is a good thing they think you are dead or she would be looking for you. It is through no effort of hers that you are alive. Know that? You do, eh? You don't act like it. Don't you know she would search you out and kill you like a dog? Do you happen to know where she is?"

Feodor mentioned Lucka's address.

"I know that. I have watched for her, but she seems gifted with a Gyges ring—something makes her invisible—to my eyes at least. Who is this man you are driving about the last few days?"

"His Excellency's son."

"Why lie to me?" the man demanded, his face suddenly ferocious. "I know where Sergius' son is. I have known for years. I have watched him too. You may not know it, Feodor, but you are a —— poor spy. Here I kept that demon wife of yours from killing you. Hid you away so Sergius could not find you when your wife made your death the price she wanted Sergius to pay for some new treachery of hers. And I forged papers to show that you have been a respectable employe of a Russian banker at Moscow so you can become Sergius' chauffeur, and you repay me with lies.

"If I did not know you were stupid I would think you dishonest. Sergius' son! Bah! I know that snake, and I know where he is. And Lucka—you let him go on living with your wife. He must have bought you off. How much did he pay you, anyway?"

Alexis knew very well that Lucka had not paid Feodor anything, but he chose that sarcastic method of stirring up the sluggish fellow to a belated revenge.

Some years before when Marie, or Rachel Sobetski, thought she had good reason for killing her husband, and tried to do it, Alexis had taken him under his protection, caused the report of his death to be circulated, and later worked him into the service of Sergius with the aid of forged recommendations. Alexis had no illusions as to Feodor's ability as a spy, but Feodor

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did serve to keep him informed of Sergius' whereabouts; and knowing that much, Alexis had plenty of agents to watch Sergius from a distance.

"He has not paid me anything!" Feodor answered indignantly, resenting the idea that his vengeance could be assuaged with money.

"Bah! Who saved you from the police when your wife tried to make it appear that you were a nihilist? Who proved to you that she was a double traitor and that this man Lucka was her lover? And then who swore vengeance on both of them? A clod of Russian mud it was. Not a man. A stick, a cobblestone—you!"

Alexis knew, and had known for a long time, that if Lucka was murdered the nihilists would be disconcerted and inactive for months, perhaps years. It was easy enough to have a man murdered in Russia; it was another and a more complicated and delicate thing to have one murdered in America.

"I have looked for them. I went this morning to their house and they were gone."

"I went last night to the fence of the Grand Duke Sergius. And I am going again tonight, Feodor. You leave that gate unlocked as you pass through tonight."

"Yes sir."

"And the Countess Olga—how is she, Feodor?"

"I have not seen her for many days, sir. It has sometimes been weeks. She is like a prisoner."

"Like a prisoner? She is a prisoner. And the Czar has been told that she is loyal to Sergius. I have told him different. That is the chief reason why I am here, Feodor. I came to take her away. And that fat Peter with the cow eyes? He is with the grand duke?"

"Yes sir."

"I am going to have something interesting to say to them, Feodor. Yes. It will be interesting. Leave the gate unlocked. I and a friend or two will make a call. I know it is useless to ask you what Sergius is going to do with his American he calls his son. You never know anything of value. That is why I haven't bothered you the last few days. I preferred to watch. Are you sure that this young American is not your wife's newest lover? Of course you are not. But that would be for Lucka to settle with him. He did not steal her from you. He stole her from Lucka.

"And, Feodor, any time that you appear before my valet—even if I am not in—and any time you can show him a spot of blood on your hand, and say: 'The enemy of the Czar is dead,' you can have two thousand dollars, a ticket to Russia, and a place as my chauffeur when you arrive."

"Yes sir," Feodor answered thoughtfully.

Alexis turned away toward the café where MacDougal could be seen through the window. Alexis looked at him for a moment, then went in and sat down at a table across from MacDougal, who though pretending to read his paper was carefully scanning every face that entered.

He felt the blood pounding to his face as he recognized Alexis. There was no doubt as to his identity: the photograph had been excellent. MacDougal could not help but stare.

Alexis noticed and returned the stare for a moment, then arising, came to MacDougal, and politely inquired:

"Have we by chance met before? I am not good at remembering faces or names, but I never like to let any one think that I do not care to remember him. And may I sit at your table? Then neither of us will be lonesome. It seems that I do rather remember having met you. My memory is wretched. You will pardon me, won't you?"

Alexis had the impressive poise and manner to carry off the part he was assuming; and he had no way of knowing that if his photograph had never been in Olga's room that MacDougal's attitude would not have been so instinctively hostile.

Instead of returning an agreeable and polite answer, MacDougal arose and bowing stiffly said:

"My memory for faces and names is excellent, and though I never saw you before, I have been charged with a message to you. Monsieur, the Grand Duke Sergius conveys his compliments, and having consulted an astrologer, wishes me to inform you that it is written in the stars that if you do not take the first steamer for Russia, a knife will suddenly take root between your ribs!"

"The devil!" Alexis said, fastening his black eyes intently on the boy's face. "How on earth did he know you would meet me?"

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"You will have noticed that he instructed me to say that he had consulted an astrologer. Perhaps——"

Alexis laughed.

"No, Sergius does not dabble in soothsaying. I came in here to try to strike up an acquaintance with you. I had no idea you would recognize me. How did you know who I am?"

"I could make no mistake. You are a Russian. A man of military bearing. And having seen the photograph in——"

"Olga? You have met her?"

There was something menacing in the question. Alexis was obviously a man of violent jealousies.

"Yes. She shot me."

"Shot you!"

"Under the impression—a wholly wrong one, I assure you—that I had been selected to marry her."

"Is that why Sergius picked you up! You see, I too, know some things. Perhaps I have an astrologer for a friend. Did he try to pass you off as his son to her?"

"I told her that I was not."

MacDougal disliked to have to justify himself in the eyes of Alexis, but he would not, could not, let the man have a wrong impression of him. Where Olga was concerned it was almost a personal matter between them, though he had no wish to let Alexis know that—as yet.

"Then you are not a rascal," Alexis said bluntly. "No. You haven't the face of a rascal. I don't know what business Sergius has with you. No. My astrologer can't tell everything. But you will be a wiser boy before another sunrise. Now go back to Sergius and tell him this from me, and it is true; say: 'Alexis did not know that you were aware that he was here. He thanks you for the warning. He remembers that you have beaten him before in certain affairs, and he has no desire to find a knife between his ribs.' Say that to him: that I have no desire to find a knife between my ribs. Understand?"

"You mean that you are returning to Russia?" MacDougal asked hopefully.

"I mean what I have said. I would make a guess that Sergius himself will suddenly leave for a long journey. I don't think that you will go with him. No. Not unless you are foolish. But tonight Sergius will start on his long, long journey. You may tell him that. Tell him I wish him to be aware of my gift of prophecy."

With that Alexis abruptly turned and went out, leaving MacDougal with an uneasy heart for there had been something sinister in his manner of speaking; and Alexis was one whose sinister words were backed by a bold, determined personality. He was not the sort of man who threatens lightly.

MACDOUGAL sat down to try to think over what had happened. Almost at once his thoughts were scattered to the four winds. He had been so intently puzzling over Alexis' words that he had not noticed the woman who came breathlessly through the door until she had taken a chair opposite him.

It was that woman—whom he knew as Rachel Sobetski—again!

He straightened up quickly, saying—

"You——"

She had given much thought to what she would say to MacDougal and how she would explain the way she had tried to kill him; but more than anything else, she wanted to discover how he had found out that dreaded name. The detective that Olga had engaged to follow MacDougal had telephoned when he went into the café, and Marie had hurried to meet him. She had started through the door when she recognized Alexis, and she had at once withdrawn and waited until he left.

She was sure, however, that it had been from Alexis that MacDougal had learned who she was; she was also sure that Alexis, Olga and MacDougal were in league. This was extremely surprising, because she knew something of the inveterate enmity between Alexis and the grand duke. Her deduction was that MacDougal was making a dupe of the grand duke, whereas Olga had, apparently, tried to deceive her by making it appear that the grand duke was using MacDougal for purposes of his own.

The situation appeared precariously complicated to Marie; but it was characteristic of her that in her zeal for meddling with the affairs of others she could not bring herself to use discretion. It would have been wiser for her to disappear from the scene, to tell her husband as much as she could without betraying herself, and to induce him to go into hiding with her until Alexis and Sergius had settled their long-standing quarrel.

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But she wanted to find out what Alexis and this young fellow, MacDougal—though she did not know his name—were planning.

When he addressed her: "You ——!" Marie swiftly launched into her carefully prepared story.

"I just found out this morning what a dreadful mistake I had made! I thought you were the grand duke's son——"

"Is that why you tried to kill me?"

"I tried to kill you!" she exclaimed with every semblance of horrified astonishment.

"Yes. Last night. You remember very well."

"Of what are you talking? Last night? Why, I was with a friend of yours. I am living with her now."

Marie was somewhat embarrassed because she did not know Olga's name either; but she knew enough to know that she and this man were friends.

"With Olga?" he exclaimed incredulously.

Marie smiled knowingly.

"I am not mentioning names. But she said that I should say to you: 'You are foolish to trust me, but you must do it anyway!' "

MacDougal was dumfounded. He had no doubt as to the identity of the woman who had lured him to the private dining-room; nor could he now have any doubt that she had been sent by Olga.

"You can't have them!" he said flatly.

"Can't have what?"

"What you expected to get by that sentence. I can't imagine why Olga would trust you. I told her you were the woman that knifed me, and you could not have been with Olga last night because she did not leave the grand duke's house until after I came back from the city!"

Marie saw the ground was cut from under her; but his words were illuminating. She had not before suspected, or even thought, that this woman could be the Countess Olga who, so Guyot had said, was financing Sergius. She had not known that the woman's name was Olga until a few minutes before.

She replied with that hurt smile so characteristic of women who lie desperately when discovered in falsehood:

"I am sorry if you think I have deceived you. There has been a mistake. Some time you will understand. I have been honest with you—more honest than you think. I have long been a friend of the Countess Olga—" that was risking a guess as to the woman's identity, but Marie was desperate.

"Impossible! Last night when I was helping her to escape, she said that you were a nihilist. She overheard Sergius and Guyot talking of you. They spoke of you sometimes as Rachel Sobetski and sometimes as Marie Lucka—what is the matter?"

Marie felt as though the room was suddenly whirling through space: Sergius and Guyot knew that she was Rachel Sobetski! Her husband would learn of it. One of them would be sure to tell him, if he had not already been told.

She reached across the table and drank the glass of water that had been placed for MacDougal, and pulled herself together. There was only one thing to do, and that was to bluff as long as possible and then appeal to the strongest for help. Sergius was the strongest. There was much she could say to Sergius. He would thank her for it.

"I am sorry," she repeated, "if you think I have deceived you. I assure you on my honor that I did not so much as see you last night. It is true that I was not with the Countess Olga early in the evening, but I was with her early this morning. She asked me to do her a favor and meet you, and I did want to apologize anyway.

"I had made a terrible mistake in thinking that you were the grand duke's son that first day when I spoke to you. I am a nihilist. And if I had not found out that you were not Sergius' son, the nihilists would have thrown a bomb under your car some evening when you were driving home. The plans are made! It was because I did not want to see you killed that I tried not to believe that you were his son. But I did believe it! Yet I wanted to save you—and you accuse me of trying to stab you!"

Marie was almost in tears.

MacDougal could scarcely help believing her. He felt sorry for her, even though he was still sure that she, and no one else, had wielded that knife. It was extremely disconcerting: the more so because he knew that she had come to him from Olga.

"Here," he said, taking the box of jewels from his pocket, "take these to the countess. I know I am foolish in trusting you, but as you said, I can't help myself. Then

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remembering the instructions from the grand duke—who, as yet, so far as MacDougal actually knew, had not broken the agreement between them—he added: "And the grand duke requested me to say this to you: 'You have robbed the bait from a trap that the grand duke set for bigger game, and the only way that you can keep Monsieur Lucka from learning who you really are is to return the papers at once.' "

For a moment Marie's face was blank. Then hope leaped in it. As Olga had predicted, the grand duke thought that she had stolen the papers. She must see him at once! They could undoubtedly come to an understanding. Perhaps he did not know that MacDougal had helped the Countess Olga to escape; or that Olga had herself robbed the trap, as he called it, of the bait; or, if Olga herself had not known that Alexis was in the city, perhaps Sergius would not know it and would be glad to learn. He had not yet told Lucka who she "really was"—she must keep him from telling.

Hers was a brain much given to rapid scheming.

"Listen," she said, glancing at her watch and calculating the time that it would take her to return to the hotel where Olga was waiting, "you are to telephone the countess at twenty minutes of four. Be sure that you telephone at exactly twenty minutes of four. This is the number."

She wrote it on the back of a card together with the name he was to ask for to get Olga.

"You must not try to see her, but you may telephone. She said so. And she will tell you that you have made a mistake in doubting me! Good-by."

And she left a smile.

OLGA was at the table in her room rereading the papers she had taken from the cabinet of Sergius. She glanced at the watch on her wrist. It was 3:30.

At that moment the door flew open and Marie sprang excitedly into the room.

"Quick!" she cried. "I am followed. Sergius himself! He must have followed me from the café but I did not see him until I got into the elevator here. I caught a glimpse of him just as it started up."

For a moment Olga was bewildered. She looked in first one direction and then the other as though seeking the means for flight.

"Your papers," Marie said, as she began gathering them up. "We must not let him find them. Get your hat and coat on."

"Are you sure it was Sergius?"

"Oh, absolutely! I would know him anywhere at any time," Marie replied, quickly bunching the papers.

Then the telephone rang.

Each looked at the other doubtfully.

"That must be he!" Olga said. "Don't answer it."

"Yes. I'll answer it. I know his voice. I'll tell him he has the wrong party," and she went to the telephone—still holding on to the papers.

"Hello—" then with her hand over the receiver she turned and told Olga that it was not Sergius—"whom did you want? Who is it, please? MacDougal?"

And with her hand again over the receiver she asked Olga if any one was known to her by the name of MacDougal?

Olga almost jerked the receiver from her hand, saying—

"Let me talk to him!"

"I'll just take a peep out in the hall," Marie replied as she gave up the receiver and started for the door.

She stepped into the hall and flew to the elevator, ran from the lobby, jumped into a taxi and was gone. She still held the papers in her hand; and in her pocket was the box that MacDougal had given her.

Laughing nervously, but happily to herself, she opened the box: a dozen brilliant rings, a necklace of pearls, a scintillating brooch and many gem-studded pins and clasps, heaped together, dazzled her eyes.

Marie gasped.

"What luck! It pays to keep your head. Sergius need not know that I have this. If it comes to the worst I can swear that MacDougal never gave them to me. It would be just like him to steal them anyway!"

In the meantime, Olga, very much shaken by the belief that Sergius was at hand, had tried to tell MacDougal what was the matter, and had said over and over that she wished that he was with her. He wanted to come, but she explained that she could not wait, but would have to get out right away.

"I don't know where to go or what to do!" she said, speaking more helplessly than she felt, for both countess and serving maid enjoy the essentially feminine luxury of

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appealing to the chivalry of some man. "If Sergius finds me he will do something dreadful. Say I am insane—or something."

"Oh," MacDougal answered, "I almost forgot. He told me to say to you—I don't know why he thought I might meet you—maybe he is suspicious—but he told me to say to you: 'You can make what protests and explanations you please to the Czar, but he will confiscate your estates when he learns that for some years their revenue has been diverted from you to Sergius. But if you return, your estates will be secured to you.' "

Olga said something in Russian.

"What was that?"

"I said '—— my estates!' " she replied bitterly. "Why should I care so much if the Czar seizes them, when for years Sergius has held them. He was appointed my guardian when I was scarcely more than a child. I have always hated him! When he was banished everything of his was confiscated, but my property was not touched. He has kept me a prisoner. He wanted the revenue. If my estates had been confiscated, Sergius would have turned me out!"

"Any time you are turned out," MacDougal replied earnestly, "I will not feel presumptuous in offering you everything I have, including my heart, hand and name!"

The boy was romantically unaware just at that moment of how pitifully little he had to offer anybody.

"Bless you!" she said impulsively. "You dear boy! But I must go. Something must have happened to Marie! Watch the personal column of the papers—if nothing appears there from me, put a gun to Sergius' head and make him tell you where I am. I will want you to come to me." She finished quickly, and hung up the receiver, blushing, excited.

She looked about for a moment, went into the hall and looked up and down, but Marie was not to be seen.

She went to the elevator and inquired of one boy and then the other, until she learned that a woman answering Marie's description had hurried down, and actually run from the lobby. No. No one had seen a tall man with a black beard!

Then it occurred to Olga that if Sergius had authorized MacDougal to transmit any message such as had been given her, that he, Sergius, would not himself be searching for her; and remembering how Marie had gathered up those precious papers the suspicion came that they had been stolen right from under her nose!

Her uneasiness gave way to anger. She had been tricked. Of course that nihilist wanted the list of the society's members to be kept from the Russian police; and no doubt she felt that she could make a good use of the other papers, too.

Olga would have given much to be in touch with MacDougal again. She wanted him. She felt lonely and helpless, and curiously enough it was not at all of Alexis she thought, but of MacDougal.

She called a messenger and having written a personal, requested "H. M." to call the same number and ask for "O."

X

MARIE again found the gate leading into the grand duke's grounds unlocked. It had purposely been left unlocked because Sergius hoped and rather expected that Guyot would come that way, not daring perhaps to attempt to use the secret passage again. Sergius was very much afraid that some one was not only watching that passageway, but that some one might try to use it as a means of sneaking upon him. He and Peter had investigated, and so far as they could tell no one was watching, and certainly nothing had been changed except that the entrance under the garage was unlocked.

He had not locked it again; but took means to convert the passageway into a trap—the simplest kind of a trap—and prayed to the devil that he might catch Alexis in it. Alexis was the one man on earth whom Sergius feared. Alexis was as cruel as himself, as reckless, as daring; and the enmity between them was to the death. So Sergius prepared his trap that he might be warned of Alexis' coming.

He stretched a thread across the tunnel so that any one walking through would strike it just below the knee. And since this thread must be arranged so that whoever struck it would be unaware that he had done so, because if he found that a thread was there he would naturally become suspicious that it was connected with some kind of signal; therefore Sergius fastened

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one end of the thread to the side of the tunnel and ran the other hand across the tunnel and through a series of screw-eyes until it was brought into his own room.

He attached this end to a sheet of paper. Then going into the tunnel again, he fastened a razor at the first screw-eye in such a way that the least pressure against the thread would cut it, and the paper in his room would flutter to the floor and warn him that some one was coming.

It was quite ingenious, and when the arrangement was complete and had been tested, Sergius drew the revolver from his drawer and laid it on his desk to be ready. He was determined not to take chances, and chuckled sardonically as he thought of trapping those who would probably use the passageway to trap him.

And so he had caused the gate to be left unlocked. In the daytime it had been kept locked chiefly to prevent Olga from getting out; though at night Sergius had felt the need of it to keep any one from slipping in as much as to keep any one from slipping out.

Marie drove through, and Peter, continually on watch as usual, opened the door for her even before she was out of the taxi; which she dismissed, for she did not expect to have use for a machine again that night. She had fled to the grand duke for protection; and she expected a welcome. The papers she was bringing back, as well as the information about Olga, MacDougal and Alexis, should assure her a welcome.

Peter took her at once to the grand duke who sat at his desk writing.

She advanced toward him with the papers that she had brought extended.

"You have thought it best to return them, I see. You stole them very cleverly, madame," Sergius said coldly.

"I did not steal them at all, Excellency!"

"Then why," he answered cynically, "did you bring them back when I threatened to tell your husband that I had been robbed by Rachel Sobetski?"

Marie could not help flinching whenever she heard that name; but she tried to conceal the nervous shudder in the shrug of an expressive shoulder as she replied:

"Excellency, I am a liar. From girlhood, I have either worked with or against the police, and lies have been my only weapons——"

"Indeed? My son thought you struck with something sharper last night!"

"Your son!" she said with bold scornfulness. "You mean an American tramp. No anger yet, Excellency! Hear me out. We must be honest with each other. You know I am Rachel Sobetski. I know your son is not your son——"

"Woman, be careful!" His warning was delivered in a menacing tone.

"Let me tell my story, please. I did try to kill him. I would have killed anybody yesterday that knew I was Rachel Sobetski. But Alexis told him! He and Alexis were together today. I saw them. He—your American son—helped the Countess Olga to escape. It was she who stole your papers. She was in the tunnel waiting this morning, and when you went out with my husband, she put a gun to my head and made me leave with her. I was her prisoner.

"But I escaped, snatched the papers and came to you. She told me this man was not your son. He and Alexis must be silenced! Here are the papers I have brought you. I have brought you information that your so-called son is a spy. In return I ask that he be silenced!"

"And that story you told me this morning—what of that? Why did you say Guyot would kill him?"

"I was afraid this so-called son would tell Lucka that I was Rachel Sobetski. I did not want him to meet the nihilists. That is the truth. Upon my honor!"

Sergius was thoughtful for a moment.

"Where is the countess?"

Marie told him.

"Where is Guyot?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him today. He is usually with my husband, though. And Lucka usually stays indoors."

Sergius was again thoughtful while his eyes were fixed intently on her. After a time he said:

"You have spoken truthfully in saying that you lie. My son was in bed when Olga escaped. I know that. But I believe you are right in saying that he and Alexis are plotting together. From no one else could he have learned that you are Sobetski. From no other source could you have learned that he is not really my son—that is, if he did not tell you, he told some one else who has told you. Who was it?"

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"The countess."

"I do not believe it. You can show me no proof that it was she, instead of yourself who stole my papers. You can show me no proof that you have seen her, been with her, been near her."

Though Marie had talked boldly to him, she was afraid. Her fate seemed hanging in the balance. Impulsively she cried out:

"I can, Excellency! Look! I stole the papers—and I stole these!"

With that she thrust out the box of jewels, holding it up to his eyes.

Sergius looked at them for a moment, then again staring straight into her eyes, said:

"MacDougal dies! You have convinced me."

THEN followed some two hours of earnest talk between them. Sergius was cautious. He did not tell her anything that she did not already know, but he pretended to make of her a confidante. And Marie in turn was troubled by a knowledge of Sergius' affairs which she did not dare give so much as an intimation of: that is, Olga had convinced her that Sergius had made a dupe of the nihilists through Guyot. But Marie was afraid to let him know that.

But because she knew that, she understood when Sergius explained—plausibly—that he must get in communication with some reliable person who would make common cause with him against Alexis.

"Guyot hates him. Now if I could talk to Guyot! I have watched that young man for years. I have faith in his ability, and if I could talk with him we could arrange some scheme to put an end to Alexis. And I must see the countess again. She must be brought back here. Supposing that you go to Guyot and tell him everything that has happened and ask him to come to see me? Bring him back with you. Do you think that would be a good plan?"

"You mean," she asked in surprise, "I am to tell him that this man MacDougal is not your son?"

"No. Maybe you had better not tell him that," Sergius replied, looking at her in a queer manner. "Tell him Alexis is trying to destroy the nihilists and me, and that I need help. You and I can have that other little secret between us."

"And this MacDougal?"

"Will never leave this house again," he said quietly. Then added: "But you will go for Guyot at once?"

"I sent back the taxi I came in," she answered.

Marie did not want to go, but she did not care to appear as though not wanting to go.

"Wait," and Sergius pressed a button.

In a few moments Peter appeared.

"Has Feodor returned? Good. And—my son? Good. Tell him not to leave the house again until I give permission. Better than that, have him come to me, and I will tell him. Have the car brought around and placed at the disposal of Madame Lucka. Tell Feodor to be sure and lock the gate again, both as he goes out and when he returns. Then tell my son to come to me."

WHEN Marie stepped into the limousine she did not glance at the chauffeur, and so she did not see his amazed and burning eyes. And when the car was driven through the gate and he got down to lock it, she did not see that after fumbling with the lock he fiercely threw something away, as though by that gesture he was committing himself to a definite, inexorable purpose.

Indeed, Feodor had not only left he gate unlocked, but he had thrown the key away!

MACDOUGAL entered the grand duke's room, and before a word was spoken, he realized that something was wrong.

Sergius was cold and calm. He let MacDougal stand for some minutes before speaking, and all the while looked at him. When he spoke his voice was chilling.

"I do not often make a mistake in judging men," he said. "But when I do, they pay for the mistake."

"What do you mean?" MacDougal asked, outwardly bold, but inwardly sure that Sergius had discovered the help he had given to Olga. "I spoke to the three persons you expected me to speak to, and I gave your messages as you directed."

"You did."

"Yes. I did not see the Countess Olga, but from Rachel Sobetski I learned her telephone number and called her."

"What did she say?"

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"That she was not concerned over her estates."

"And Alexis?"

"That he remembered how you had beaten him in other affairs, and that he would leave for Russia."

"He said that!"

"Yes."

"You lie!" Sergius shouted. "You have been a traitor to me. It was from Alexis that you learned that Marie Lucka was Rachel Sobetski—and that name has brought all this trouble!"

"You lie! You lie yourself!" MacDougal flamed, clenching his fist. "I never saw Alexis until today." Then momentarily forgetting himself, he went on angrily: "And it was your chauffeur, Feodor, who told me she was Rachel Sobetski. He sent me the note. He said she used to be his wife."

"What? What's that?" Sergius screamed, his cold, poised manner completely shattered. "Good God, if that is so everything is lost!"

"It is so," MacDougal replied firmly, but wonderingly.

"Why didn't you tell me? What do you mean by deceiving me? I have sent that woman away in my car and he is driving! Do you know what that means? He will kill her! I know the whole story of their trouble. I never knew him. Alexis again! Alexis has worked that spy on to me! You too! By God, I believe that you never intended to jump into that river. You trapped me! I almost believe that. Get to your room. Stay there. I'll finish with you tomorrow. Get out!"

MacDougal turned and left; and though he had been given much else to think about, he could not help wondering what on earth the grand duke was doing with a sheet of paper that fluttered from the end of a thread!

But that piece of paper did not long engage his thoughts.

He went to his room; and hour after hour he paced back and forth, or sat by the grate, thinking over what had happened. The grand duke would not listen to reason. Olga had told him the grand duke's plans were diabolical, and he could not doubt Olga. She was in danger, and he wanted to help her. He did not know where she was, but certainly he could never find out if he was to be cooped up in this house.

MacDougal studied over and over whether or not to try to escape, and how best to go about it. The grand duke had lied when he said that he was doing nothing illegal: he was trying to assassinate his way to a throne. Olga had said so. It was hard to believe; but MacDougal could no longer doubt her.

He decided to try to get away; but thought it best to wait until about midnight before making the attempt.

XI

THE Grand Duke Sergius sat alone in the dungeon-like room, and his eyes rested meditatively on the sheet of paper, motionless, at the end of the thread. It was a peculiar room, designed for emergencies: sound-proof and windowless, and the curious panelling about the walls would have made it difficult for any one to remember just exactly which panel formed the secret door even after any one had seen it open.

But though his eyes were on the sheet of paper and his fingers toyed with the revolver before him on the desk, Sergius was thinking of something else. His jaw was tightly set, and a light such as is scarcely ever seen in a sane man's eyes burned between his narrowed lids.

The plans of years were threatened. Sergius was determined that he should win, and his determination was something to challenge the might of kings. For a quarter of a century, with the unerring precision of a master-strategist, he had been preparing his campaign to seize the throne of Russia. He had worked carefully and planned deeply. The guerdon was worth the cost.

He had begun when his only son was a mere babe, and not one day in those twenty-five years had passed without making its contribution to the master plot. The number of men he had trusted with his complete confidence was precisely three, and no more: Peter, Jean Guyot and one of the Czar's own ministers who had secretly nursed a deadly hate for Nicholas.

It was this minister who, to aid Sergius, had brought about his banishment, the confiscation of his property, caused the report of his death to be officially announced, and yet so intrigued that Sergius was able to retain the Countess Olga as a

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prisoner and enjoy the revenue from her tremendous estates. Sergius had wished banishment for two reasons: one was to escape the formalities of court life which required a man of his birth to waste much time in ceremonious foolery; and the other reason was that he wished to have the reputation of a liberal and democratic man. That is, he wished the nihilists to be predisposed in his favor.

The minister was two years dead; but his death had not inconvenienced Sergius in the least. The minister had completed his work. Of the living, only Guyot and Peter knew as much of his plans as he himself. He had no secrets from either.

Guyot had been trained for service with the nihilists, and both by reason of his native ability and through information and guidance that Sergius was able to give him, he had attained—especially for one of his years—to a position of unusual influence.

But though those two were the only confidants, Sergius had many friends in Russia. He had kept in secret communication with many people of importance who admired him for his supposedly liberal views; and though none of them expected ever to see him made Czar or suspected his ambitions, all of them and many others who were not in communication with him would have welcomed him to the throne and given their support in the expectation that he would abolish the tyrannical régime.

Though Peter was wholly trusted, it was to Guyot that Sergius looked for real assistance. Guyot knew everything that Sergius could tell him. Guyot knew that Sergius would be a hard-handed ruler, and that he was merely hoodwinking the nihilists and the other liberals.

Guyot had been trained in his part by Peter. While still very young, Peter, representing himself as a Frenchman, had pretended to adopt Guyot, and had proved a master-tutor. Then when Guyot was old enough to shift for himself, Peter had caused it to appear that he was dead, had shaved off his beard, and again returned to Sergius.

Sergius felt that none could have even suspected how deeply he was planning. Many, especially Alexis and his clique, nursed an undying and intense enmity against him, and were naturally eager to believe him up to some sort of deviltry, and did suspect that he was leagued with the nihilists. This suspicion was founded on his "liberal" views, which, while winning prestige with the nihilists, embittered the aristocrats.

Alexis and Sergius had, figuratively, crossed swords many times. Sergius was the more cunning, the deeper thinker.

Added to the enmity was the love that Alexis bore for Olga's estates, and his desire to marry her.

It was of those things that Sergius thought as he sat meditatively watching the sheet of paper that floated motionless at the end of the thread. He realized that the work of a quarter of a century would be futile if he did not crush Alexis; and his idea of crushing anybody was to kill him.

Sergius had but one weak spot in his heart. That was for his son, who had been curiously concealed from the world. Much of the intensity put into his plotting had been through the almost insane desire to make that boy heir to the throne. It was well known that the son had disappeared when a child—reported to have been kidnaped. And when Sergius had had that report circulated he had looked ahead to the time he would find some friendless fellow to play the rôle of his son and be given to the nihilists as a hostage when they began their campaign of assassination.

He had also looked ahead and counted upon the watchfulness and resource of Guyot to so guard that hostage as to keep him from having reason or opportunity to tell the truth to any of the nihilist leaders.

Then by some incalculable chance, MacDougal—selected as sacrifice for the nihilists, who would be furious to find that Sergius, when Czar, would be more cruel and relentless than any ruler of modern times—had learned the secret name of Maria Lucka. And that one slip, like a domino tipped over in a row, had caused, or had seemed to cause, a succession of difficulties. The unexpected appearance of Alexis had added to the complications. The only remedy was the death of both.

And Lucka, too, would have to die.

Sergius had it worked out with his usual cunning. No one but Lucka, Guyot and Marie—excepting Olga, who would be tracked and brought back and held as a prisoner more closely than ever—knew that MacDougal had been passed off as his son. He felt sure that he could compel Marie to

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agree to some subsequent imposition on the nihilists. Lucka, however, was an honest man. He must be put out of the way. Besides, with his death, Guyot would probably succeed him as the nominal, as well as the real, leader.

Therefore, with Lucka dead and Marie both bribed and threatened into acquiescence, Sergius knew that he could find himself another "son" and begin all over again. That is, provided Alexis and MacDougal were disposed of.

He knew Alexis too well to expect him to leave for Russia out of fear. It seemed reasonable to believe that Olga and he might try to make use of the tunnel to get to him, because neither of them could know that Sergius knew they had discovered it. True, they must have been aware—he reasoned—that Guyot had told how he had been attacked, but the fact that Olga had made use of the tunnel the next morning indicated that they might use it again.

Sergius was sure that Guyot—for whom, more than any one else or any other cause it had been constructed—would not venture into it; for Alexis would undoubtedly be keeping a close watch at the other end.

So whoever pressed against that thread and caused the sheet of paper to drop to the floor was doomed. Sergius would take no chances.

As he sat thinking of those things, and reassuring himself by devising new and improving old details of his plot, at the back of his head was the disturbing fear that something abortive would come from the fact that Feodor—the former husband of Marie—was driving the car in which he had sent for Guyot. His hope, and a reasonable hope it seemed to him, was that Feodor would not recognize her.

He knew all about the way Marie had falsely reported Feodor to the police as a nihilist; he knew of the way she had tried to kill him; but he had only known Feodor by name. And because he never expected that his chauffeur would have any opportunity to learn anything of his plans, Sergius had not been so very particular in engaging this one. Almost, if not entirely too late, he was learning that he had underestimated the cunning of Alexis who had succeeded in putting Feodor on to him as a spy.

EVEN as he watched it, the sheet of paper slipped slowly, with scarcely a flutter—falling like a leaf on a calm day—to the floor.

The heart of Sergius pounded with excitement. It was rarely that his blood ever flowed the faster for anything; but now he was tense as a youth on his first adventure.

His face settled into grim lines as he swiftly arose, picking up the revolver and pointing it toward the secret door.

Leveling it straight at the door he pressed the small knob under the desk with his knee. The door flew open noiselessly.

Sergius shot—again—again—again—again!

As he fired the first shot he had heard the clatter of footsteps as though some one was running toward him; but after the first shot the room was filled with the terrific reverberations.

Faintly the cry of some one wounded reached him.

Sergius had continued to hold the door open with his knee pressed against the knob. He stood under the light, in full view of any one coming down the passageway. He could not see far into the tunnel. Faith in himself, in his destiny, in the intuitive feeling that he could not miss, had inspired him to that reckless act. He had not thought of the danger of offering himself as target, but knew he could shoot several times before the surprised intruder could possibly reply. No more than that, he knew with a kind of psychic sense which on occasion comes to almost every man who takes desperate chances, that he could not miss.

Nor had he missed. But the voice that came agonizingly to him caused his blood to run cold.

"Father, you have killed me!"

The voice came like an echo out of the tombs; and stumbling weakly, Jean Guyot appeared in the doorway.

For countable seconds, Sergius was speechless with horror; then with a terrible oath he flung the gun across the room, and leaped to the side of his son, who had fallen to the floor.

"Jean! Jean! Jean!" he cried. "Oh, my boy! You must be saved! Where are you hit?" Then furious cursings. "I thought you were Alexis!" More cursings. "It

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can't be! Why did you come that way! You must be saved—you will be!"

"No." Jean stopped, and coughed hard, blood came from his mouth. Then weakly, disconnectedly:

"It's over—lost—everything! I was with Lucka—in his room. Marie came. Said you wanted me. Then the door burst open—a lunatic with a scarred face and a knife. Marie screamed. He said, 'Rachel Sobetski, at last!' and killed her. Then stabbed Lucka. It was Feodor—your chauffeur." With exhausting effort he continued: "I wanted to get to you—knew gate was locked—risked the passageway. Took your machine to come. It's all over—all over—father, we have lost!"

Sergius held the boy's head on his arm as he kneeled beside him. Jean coughed bloodily and gasped; his throat rattled from hard breathing.

Sergius wept and cursed and begged him to live.

"Father," the boy whispered with agonizing effort.

"Yes. What is it? Tell me."

"Promise—I'm dying—promise me——"

"Anything—I've promised, Jean. Don't die. You can't! But anything—what is it—I'll do it," he begged and promised hysterically.

Jean's eyes opened, and the last of life burned within them like coals puffed to flame by the wind that is snuffing it out—

"Don't let Alexis live!"

"I swear, I swear it!" Sergius cried, his face upturned, his hand raised.

And when he looked down the boy was dead.

MacDOUGAL turned from the window and put out the light in his room. The night was moonless, black, and he had put out the light so that the watchful Peter, if he were watching, or had noticed, would think that MacDougal had gone to bed.

MacDougal had heard that the fence was electrically connected with an alarm in the house; and, moreover, it was topped with sharp spikes. He believed, however, that, with even one arm helpless, it was better to make the attempt to get over than to face the grand duke in the morning and perhaps be made a prisoner and kept from Olga. But what really gave him hope was the fact that the gate had been left open that afternoon. Perhaps it was still open. Anyway, he could slip down and see; and if it were locked, then he would have to look for the step-ladder that he had noticed some days ago behind the kitchen.

Certainly he would never get any place if he remained in his room. He had not liked the manner and attitude of the grand duke, and sharply to his memory came the sinister words that the grand duke had spoken when he caused the secret door of that passageway to open, assuring MacDougal that, failing to keep faith, he would be carried out through it and never seen again.

MacDougal had planned to wait until around midnight, but the night was so black, the house, as usual, so quiet, the need for escape so great, that he prepared to make the venture sooner.

Quietly he opened the door of his room and listened. The very tension of listening in the dark made him nervous. Let any one, however strong his nerves, stand in darkness and peer with unseeing eyes and strain with his ears expectantly through a half-opened door, and the taut nerves will vibrate and often play tricks. One who nervously looks steadily into the darkness will see, or think that he sees, something move; he will hear, or think that he hears, something softly rustling or whispering.

MacDougal stood for a long time, waiting, wondering. Then it occurred to him that what seemed so unfamiliar outside his door was the utter darkness of the hall. The tall bronze maiden with the glazed globe upraised from the pedestal at the foot of the stairs had nightly shed a dim glow that gave even the upper hall a kind of twilight gloom. But tonight the hall was black.

It occurred to MacDougal that this was strange. The light usually burned all night. He had come down in the morning and found it still burning. Perhaps the globe had burned out; perhaps some one had turned it off. He could not imagine why.

Anything different from what one expects is often disturbing; and this was disturbing to MacDougal, even though he thought that the darkness would reduce his chances of being seen slipping from the house. He was perfectly familiar with the hallways, with the stairs, and needed no light.

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He stepped softly, noiselessly into the hall and paused.

It seemed to him that he heard a soft shuffling, but it had stopped—if it ever existed—just as he strained to analyze the sound.

He moved forward.

Somewhere in the house something creaked.

He gave an involuntary start, but caught himself, called himself a fool, and tightened his muscles.

Minutes passed, and despite his native courage and resolution, a kind of panicky feeling was tugging at MacDougal's heart. But he went on, inch by inch.

Something—some vagrant fear perhaps—suggested to him that he was not alone. He felt a kind of terror that if he put out his hand he would touch somebody—he felt something akin to the feeling of a child on a lonesome road that if he looks behind him he will see a monster.

MacDougal wanted to turn and dash to his room, fling the door shut and lock it. He was disgusted with his fright, but he could not shake it off.

He came to the stairway. His heart was thumping so loudly that he could hear it!

He took the first step.

A sibilant whisper seemed to come from just in front of him—a low, almost inaudible *sh-h-h;* and in the next second he was not sure whether or not he had heard or had imagined it!

"——!" he muttered, resolutely breaking the silence; and feeling that his furtiveness was making a coward of him.

He boldly stepped down, holding on to the banister to guide him—then—

His hand slipping along the banister touched some one.

He shrank back with a low, inarticulate, fright-choked exclamation.

An electric torch blazed in his face for a second—a powerful hand closed roughly over his mouth—two arms pinioned his own to his side and painfully wrenched the one in the sling—a quick, low whisper—and all was dark and silent as the grave.

It seemed long minutes that he was held motionless, tightly, in the mysterious grip.

It was as though his captors were waiting for him to struggle; but he did not. He stood quietly, trying to think; and even in his predicament it occurred to him that these mysterious persons had caught and were holding him in a way that indicated much experience in work of the kind.

Some one at the foot of the stairs spoke in a low tone, very low; and one of the men holding him answered.

He could not understand what they said.

But the hold on him was not relaxed. The men made no movement.

Then the voice from the bottom of the stairs whispered in English with a touch of amusement, obviously speaking to MacDougal:

"It's lucky that you said 'Damn!' We knew you were the American."

Presently an electric-torch played on the hallway, and whoever was coming spoke loudly, with no fear of being overheard. At his words, whatever they were, the men about MacDougal at once began to talk freely. The lights were switched on. The man evidently came with the word that all had been waiting for.

MacDougal was momentarily dazzled by the light, but when—at a word of command from below—his captors released him, he glanced down and recognized Alexis.

Alexis, tall, broad-shouldered, square of face and firm of jaw, wore a long cape, one end thrown back over his shoulder, and in his hand he held a large automatic.

"My friend," he said good-naturedly to MacDougal, "you must pardon our rudeness, but we were afraid that you might cause trouble. We didn't know whether we would find Peter up-stairs or down. And Sergius—I have just been told that two of my men have stood Sergius up against the wall and will keep him there until I come. You remember, do you not, that I promised that Sergius would go on a long journey tonight?"

The question was lightly given, but its deadly import was obvious.

THEN followed an hour that haunted the dreams of MacDougal the remainder of his life. He, like all who read books that tell of war, of the inquisition, of man's inhumanity to man, knew that in the past the cruelty of the world had been great; but he had never thought that living persons could do what he was then to witness.

Alexis, by some whim which would have seemed all the more unaccountable to MacDougal had he known the officer

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better, had seemed to have taken a not unkindly fancy to MacDougal; or more exactly, perhaps, it was the desire to parade his success before a spectator. If MacDougal had so much as crossed Alexis' purpose he would have been treated differently; but the officer knew—not so much from what he had learned as because he knew Sergius and his secretive methods, and his habit of making dupes of others—that MacDougal was merely a pawn.

Curiously enough, he did not question MacDougal at all. He preferred to question Peter, whom he hated; and it seemed that he did not wish to learn what he asked with ease, for certainly his face was lighted with fiendish enjoyment when Peter was brought in and shook his head at Alexis' first question.

Alexis had invaded the grand duke's house with eight men: police agents, brought with him from Russia. Two were on guard over the grand duke, in the room where his son's body lay in a pool of blood.

Whether Alexis wished, as he said, to "entertain" MacDougal, or whether he preferred to get information that would be kept from the possession of the others who understood no English, Alexis addressed Peter in English, and told him to so answer.

Peter shook his head and said nothing.

MacDougal felt his heart go out in sympathy, even admiration, for the dull-faced, but inscrutable-eyed man who stood calmly, silently, resignedly in the midst of his captors.

The bronze maiden again threw her dim glow over the great, baronial hall; and the movement of the men as they walked from place to place, some changing position the better to see, some inattentive to what was going on, but peeking about at the furnishings, was ghost-like; and MacDougal noticed that each wore felt slippers so that their footfall was inaudible.

"You will say nothing?" Alexis asked ominously.

Peter did not answer.

Alexis turned, with a graceful gesture of his hand indicating Peter, and said to MacDougal:

"I have caught Sergius at last. I don't know what deviltry he is up to, but being Sergius, he is up to some. Before I call on him, I want to be thoroughly familiar with the topic that will be of the most interest to him. I expect Peter here to enlighten me. We Russians, when our affairs extend to other countries, never annoy the local police with our troubles, and Peter knows what is coming to him. But you see how obdurate he is.

"I have asked him first where the Countess Olga is. She is not in the house. It has been searched high and low. I asked him next what Sergius was doing with you. He has declined to answer. I have asked him, as you heard, if he would say anything. You have perceived his silence. And now——"

Sergius snapped out some command in Russian.

The six men, as though trained to answer that command with military precision, fell on Peter. He was thrown to the floor. A man sat on each leg, one held each arm, and one, taking out a penknife, took hold of the fingers of one hand while the sixth fellow drew some matches from his pocket and held one, ready to light it, above Peter's face.

"Sergius," Alexis said, "long ago turned nihilist. That Jean Guyot is his son. You are the person that raised him in France. What were the nihilists up to?"

As Peter remained silent, Alexis said something in Russian.

The man with penknife drove the blade excruciatingly beneath one of Peter's fingernails.

The pain was agonizing. He screamed—and even as he opened his mouth, a lighted match fell into it.

Peter writhed and coughed, distorted his face in the effort to blow the match from his mouth, and Alexis laughed. MacDougal turned away and leaned against the wall.

"You!" Alexis ordered. "Look this way. This is for your benefit. I may ask you a few questions before the night is over." Then again to Peter, "What is the arrangement between the nihilists and Sergius?"

No answer. Again the knife stabbed beneath a fingernail, and turned and twisted as Peter clenched his teeth determined neither to answer nor open his mouth. The pain was too great: in a burst of agony, he screamed. Again the match fell. MacDougal reeled dizzily.

Peter's tongue and the sides of his mouth were burned, and tears flowed from his eyes.

Alexis again laughed, and at his next question, Peter began to talk.

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By dint of questions and threats Alexis worked the whole story from him.

A cunning and patient fellow was Alexis, diabolically dramatic, for when he had wormed the story out of Peter he asked—

"And who is the dead man in Sergius' room?"

Peter, with a flicker of interest, said that he did not know.

He was a pitiful object, his lips blackened and red and raw; blood dripping from his fingernails, and those large eyes filled with tears that had streamed on to his cheeks.

Alexis looked at him a moment as though doubting the truth of the denial, but seemed convinced. Then after studying for some time as though thinking what else to ask, inquired about Olga.

Peter told almost all that he knew, even to the suspicion that Alexis had helped her to escape.

In a kind of jealous fury, electric, terrible, Alexis demanded:

"Who was that man? Tell me. You?"

He wheeled and addressed the last to MacDougal.

MacDougal shuddered and hesitated; but before he could speak Peter said:

"No. It wasn't he. We suspected him but I found him in bed. The man left with the countess. I still believe it was you."

There was iron in Peter's soul.

"Come on," Alexis said to MacDougal, "let us go call on Sergius."

As they turned away, the man who had dropped the matches, and who seemed to be a kind of lieutenant under Alexis, asked something.

Alexis replied carelessly, without looking around. Then to MacDougal:

"He asked me what he should do with that fellow. I said 'Kill him!' Be careful there—you act like a drunken man. What's the matter? Are you sick? Brace up. You must see Sergius start on his long journey. Peter, like a good servant, will go before and notify the devil that Sergius is coming. It isn't every night that a grand duke goes to hell—though there are precious few of them in heaven. I'm going to see how many times I can hit him without killing him. You must be drunk!"

MacDougal, sick, weak, horrified, reeled against the wall. Yet so hot within him was rage that had he had two good arms he would have jumped at Alexis, snatched at the revolver and undertaken to fight his way clear of the devilish group. But there was nothing he could do except go on.

THE grand duke was still bending over his son when three police agents, slipping through the halls in felt slippers, had pushed open the door and covered him with their pistols.

Up to that moment he had been the heart-broken father; but on that instant he became again, outwardly at least, the Grand Duke Sergius, brother of the Czar, aristocrat of aristocrats. He asked no questions. After the first start of surprise he revealed no emotion. He said nothing, but glancing coldly from face to face, raised himself to his full height, folded his arms and stood erect.

He who seemed to be the leader of the three spoke respectfully, for it was impossible for him to forget that he was in the presence of the grand duke, and asked who the dead man was.

Sergius did not answer. He did not, so much as glance at his son.

He was not pressed to talk. The leader of the three went out and reported to Alexis.

When Alexis and MacDougal came in the grand duke was still erect and motionless, his arms folded, his face set in grim lines, showing the contracted muscles about the jaw as he stoically endured his tragic plight.

His eyes ignored Alexis and fastened on MacDougal; and MacDougal turned his face to avoid the glitter of those living coals.

"Who's this?" Alexis asked, touching the dead body of the young man with his foot and staring down at the face.

Without so much as the flicker of an eyelash, Sergius replied:

"A nihilist who got in here and tried to assassinate me. I shot him."

"That's strange. That's strange," Alexis answered cynically. "Strange that the nihilists would assassinate the man they were about to make Czar. Something rather familiar about that face, too. Features remind me of some one." He looked comparingly at the grand duke. "Enough like you, Sergius, to be your son. Guyot, I believe, was his name. Jean Guyot. A nihilist all right—who aspired to be a Czarovitch!"

The fingers of Sergius, somewhat concealed under his folded arms, writhed; but not another muscle moved.

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"I am more clever than you thought I was, am I not, Sergius?"

"You have tortured Peter," the grand duke said simply; but his eyes strayed from Alexis' face and rested calculatingly for a second on the gun which he had thrown to the floor when Jean Guyot staggered through the secret door.

"Tortured him—eh!" Alexis laughed. "Well, Sergius, before I left Russia I was called into the presence of one whom it is not necessary to name, and it was said to me: 'Sergius is dead. It has been officially announced that he is dead. Any man you may find impersonating the grand duke deserves to be executed. Of course, in America they don't put a man to death for that terrible insult to the royal family. But if the execution could be arranged quietly, Russian justice would be satisfied and American justice would not be disturbed.'

"This room seems to be sound-proof, Sergius. Anyway, the house is rather isolated. I believe the execution could be arranged quietly here."

Alexis took a few steps about the room.

MacDougal, to stand out of his way, moved over to the desk and pushed aside the chair. He noticed that the sheet of paper which had floated from the end of the thread was lying on the floor. Again he wondered at it.

The two men who had been on guard over Sergius had replaced their revolvers in their pockets when Alexis came in, and had taken a position on guard at either side of the door.

Alexis, looking about, saw the revolver on the floor and kicked it in the direction of the door, saying to the men—

"Pick it up."

One stooped and put it into his pocket.

"Where is the countess?" Alexis asked quickly, suddenly, as though to surprise the grand duke into an answer.

Sergius was silent for a moment. His first impulse was not to answer. Death seemed just ahead of him: he knew what to expect from Alexis. It would be something to cheat him out of finding Olga. Then Sergius reflected on the torn photograph. Olga evidently hated Alexis, or she would not have torn his photograph. He, Sergius, had thought that it was Alexis who had helped her to escape; but perhaps there had been another man, a lover, of whom he had learned nothing; and she, loving the other, had torn Alexis' picture as expression of what she would like to do to him. To tell Alexis where Olga was would be to make trouble for both when they should meet.

Sergius named the hotel which Marie had told him of.

"Who was the man that helped her get away?" Alexis demanded.

"Her lover. I never learned his name."

Alexis flew into a fury. He strode back and forth across the room, pounding his fist in his palm, cursing, waving his arms, damning Sergius and the unknown, promising dire torture upon the lover, and swearing—all in the same breath—that he believed Sergius lied.

"I'll find her!" Alexis roared. "I'll find her and wrench the truth out of her. I'll break open the door and kill them both. I'll waste no more time with you, Sergius. You die in five minutes. By God, this fellow here—" indicating MacDougal—"shall kill you too! He's the one that ought to do it. You were going to give him to the nihilists to murder. Oh, I know all about it!

"Get over there, Sergius. Get over there in front of him. Step over the carcass of that son of yours and put your back to the wall so you'll fall on top of him, and we'll have a little pyramid of dead men."

Sergius walked to the place indicated. His step was firm, his shoulders erect, his head high. He dropped his arms to walk across the room, stepped across the body of his son, made a military about face, folded his arms again, and looked straight into MacDougal's pale face.

"Here—" Alexis extended his own revolver.

MacDougal started to reach for it, then drew back his hand.

"I can't—it would be murder!"

"Take it. I'll shoot you before I shoot him if you don't!"

"I have never shot with my left hand," MacDougal pleaded. "My right—I can't use it. And with the other—I'm nervous any way."

"You'll hit him with one of them. I'll have him step closer."

"No, no," MacDougal said hurriedly, picking up the gun, and standing closer to the desk as though to brace himself.

MacDougal was breathing hard, and with

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his eyes he strained—strained desperately—to meet those of Sergius and convey a message.

He raised the gun above his head and slowly, very slowly, began to lower it, and standing against the desk, with his right knee he began to press the knob.

The secret door behind Sergius flew open, striking him as it opened, and forcibly letting him know what had happened.

Alexis saw it open and shouted:

"Look out—shoot! Shoot!"

As Sergius whirled, MacDougal shot and released the pressure of his knee.

The door closed.

The grand duke was gone.

Alexis snatched the gun from MacDougal's hand and sprang forward, emptying it into the wall; but so perfectly matched were the panels, and so rapidly had the door opened and shut, and so great was his excitement that he shot more times into the wrong panel than into the door.

He beat on the wall, and cursing, called the men to come and break it down.

Alexis wheeled on MacDougal:

"How did he get out? How did that happen?"

"He must have touched a secret spring behind him," MacDougal hazarded, his heart in his mouth.

Alexis frantically struck and pulled and twisted at the many mysterious-looking knobs stuck on the wall.

Then an idea came to him:

"Peter—bring Peter. He knows. Get him."

One of the men left the room on the run.

In a few seconds he was back, accompanied by the fellow who had dropped the matches into Peter's mouth.

"Peter? Where is Peter? Bring him."

The man saluted and said—

"Sir, in accordance with your orders, Peter has been put to death!"

Alexis reeled as though hit by a blow; but instantly recovering, cried:

"The men—where are they? Bring them here. Break down that wall. Find the passageway. Where are they?"

The man again saluted:

"As you ordered, sir, they are preparing the house to be set on fire. I will call them."

Then MacDougal, who had not understood a word that was said, but guessed what was wanted from the gestures of Alexis and the way the men were trying to beat in the wall with the pieces of a chair, spoke to Alexis:

"I know where there's an ax—shall I get it?"

"Get it. By all means get it."

MacDougal went out of the room, ran up the back stairs, came out of the house at the rear, and ran around it, stumbling in the dark, but determined to get away. He crossed the driveway, recognizing it by the crunch of gravel, followed it to the gate which was unlocked, and took to the open road.

MACDOUGAL was soon almost exhausted, feverish, and at moments delirious. The horror of what he had gone through continually reoccurred in vivid pictures. The nervous shock had been terrific, and the wounds received from Marie's knife throbbed and burned. But on he ran. His blood was heated and his head ached, and his eyes seemed swollen almost to the bursting-point. It was difficult and painful to run with only one arm free to swing; besides, he was soon breathless.

Machines passed him, but when he saw any coming from behind him he withdrew to the side of the road and remained quiet, lest it might contain searchers sent by Alexis. He went on, dizzily, wearily. At last he fell by the side of the road.

A taxi, returning from a trip to one of the country houses further out, whose chauffeur was something of a good Samaritan, stopped. MacDougal revived a little; and insistently mentioned the hotel which he wanted to reach.

The chauffeur put him inside and started off, expecting to stop at the nearest hospital.

But MacDougal recovered sufficiently to talk, and explained that he must get to the hotel; that he had tried to walk in the hope of having a machine pick him up; that he would pay the fare, and persuaded the driver to go.

It was around three o'clock when he arrived. The street was quiet. No one was to be seen, but across the street stood a large limousine, which MacDougal did not notice; but which if he had noticed might have seemed disturbingly familiar.

He paid the chauffeur and turned toward the hotel doorway.

He did not see the tall man lurking in the

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shadows who had scrutinized him closely, and who seemed undecided whether or not to approach him.

MacDougal went into the lobby and to the desk. He aroused a drowsy clerk, and inquired for Olga under the name which Marie had given to him with the telephone number.

The clerk's fumbling fingers ran over the room list.

Yes. She was still there. But he had doubts about MacDougal. MacDougal did not look entirely respectable when one noticed closely. His clothes were rumpled and dusty. His face haggard. He might make trouble.

The clerk tried to lean close to MacDougal so as to smell his breath, and engaged him in conversation.

MacDougal felt his dizziness returning. He clutched at the edge of the desk, slipped —and all was blank.

The clerk scratched his head doubtfully. This was obviously a case for the police.

He was just turning away to call them, when a tall, black-bearded man who had lurked in the shadows when MacDougal arrived, and who had since been watching through the window, came in.

The very presence of the man impressed the clerk; the eyes awed him, the voice, though calm and not loud, had something of command in it that could not be ignored.

"This man," he said to the clerk, "is sick. Put him to bed. Notify the party he has called for and let her see him. Then send for a doctor. If it is necessary he will then be taken to the hospital. This man, as you can see, has been through some dreadful experience. Take care of him."

Before the clerk's amazed eyes, a hundred dollar bill appeared on the register.

Sergius—for it was he—thus paid his debt to MacDougal; after which he turned, went out of the lobby, and again took his place in the shadows. His plans were ruined. The work of a lifetime had been shattered. He felt oddly grateful to MacDougal for having saved his life; but the blood of his son called aloud for vengeance, and Sergius waited.

He had not waited long before several men in a machine came down the street at furious speed, slowed up to look for the street number—gleaned from a directory—and stopped before the hotel.

A man in a long cloak sprang out, and started toward the hotel door.

From off to one side a voice called:

"Alexis! It is I, Sergius!"

He shot.

Alexis lurched forward, dead.

Instantly a fusillade came from the car, even as some one sprang from it to the pavement, snatched up the body of Alexis, and reentered the car which drove furiously away, leaving the Grand Duke Sergius on the pavement, dead from a half-dozen bullets.

THERE remains little else to tell.

Olga had been aroused from restless, feverish dozing, by the clerk with the strange message that a sick man had been put into a room on the floor below and continually called for her. At first she hesitated to go, fearful that it was some kind of trap, but questioning the clerk she heard enough of a description to make her almost frantic with haste.

She dressed rapidly, and even as she was dressing the report of a gun, followed by a volley, reached through her open window.

The hotel was aroused. There was calling and shouting. People poked their heads from windows and, half-dressed or not so much, scurried through the hallways.

Olga, alarmed, excited as any, and feeling sure that in some way the shots were connected with MacDougal, felt her heart pound with passionate vengeance at the thought of any one daring to injure him. She had no time to analyze, and it was not her nature to analyze her emotions even had she had the time, but the thought of MacDougal being in danger had loosened the floodgates of love.

She rushed swiftly through the hall, dashed down the stairs and into the room where MacDougal, alone, tossed about on the bed, feverishly talking to himself.

He had not been undressed. He was grimy and his clothes were thick with dirt and dust. At first she scarcely recognized him. But he continually called her name, mingling it with the names of Alexis, Sergius, Peter, and swore that they should not hurt her, should not drop lighted matches into her mouth.

And Olga understood. The cruelties of the Russian police were not unknown to her. She called to him reassuringly, took his hands, turned his face toward her and

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begged him to recognize her. But he stared at her with unseeing eyes even while he passionately called her name.

Some of those who were wandering through the halls wondering what had happened, stopped to gape before the opened door.

"A doctor—quick!" she cried at them.

The clerk in the excitement of the shooting down-stairs had forgotten about the sick man; and as some one went about finding a doctor, the rumor started that the man who had been shot was in this room. The report flew, more people came, and rumor flying from mouth to mouth reached the police down-stairs.

Two men in uniform shoved their way through and confronted Olga. She might be very much the woman when the handsome boy she loved was hurt and unreasonably calling for her even as she stood by him, but face to face with officers, she became the Countess Olga.

"Shot, no!" she said with dignity, and by her manner repressing the officiousness of the policemen. "Get these people out of the room. They have no right here."

"Out with you!" said one of the policemen, turning with a sweeping gesture and herding the gaping group out into the hallway, while the other closed the door.

"Thank you," Olga said quietly. "This boy is sick. He was taken sick on the street. You can see by his clothes where he fell. Will you please call an ambulance, and if there is anything more you care to ask me you can come to the hospital.

"What hospital?" asked one of the policemen going to the telephone.

"The best," she replied, without taking her eyes from MacDougal's face.

The ambulance was called, and as they waited the policemen whispered together. They agreed that there was something "funny," but that she was "not that kind," and anyway there had been plenty to testify that the fellows who had shot that man down-stairs had driven off in a machine.

"Pardon me," said one of the policemen, while both of them scrutinized her closely, "but do you know anything of the shooting at all?"

"No," Olga replied, looking first one and then the other squarely in the eyes.

She was speaking true. They knew it. They had listened and heard the boy's delirious words. They were almost convinced, but not satisfied.

"Who's this Olga?" one of them asked.

"I am."

Without knowing why, the policeman said, "Oh," and felt like apologizing.

But it was those policemen who really saved Olga from embarrassment, for when the ambulance came and MacDougal was being carried down, two detectives below in the lobby who had been asking questions right and left, stopped the stretcher-bearers. The policemen then stepped forward and explained that it was all right. Olga thanked them and said that she could be found either at the hotel or hospital if they wished to further question her.

But no questions were asked. No trace was ever found of what the newspapers characteristically called the "murder car," and the death of the unknown man—a grand duke of Russia—was put down to a gangster feud. The newspapers also commented acerbidly on the wave of crime that left so many tragedies at various parts of the city that night, but whatever the police found, these various tragedies were never reported in the papers as being related one to another.

MACDOUGAL was out of his head for two days, and the nurses and physician declared that they were very nearly out of their respective heads because the woman, meaning Olga, made so many demands on them. She was openly suspicious that their care of him was not good enough, she criticized imperiously, she remained after visiting hours and with a word, a glance and a gesture, discomfited the superintendent herself when she complained at Olga's lack of respect for the rules. But Olga had never loved before.

She had perhaps flirted and coquetted; but woman's true love, for all of its passion, embodies and contains much of the mother love, and she establishes a jealous protectorate over the fortunate one: so Olga, as long as MacDougal was helpless, exercised all the solicitude of her essentially emotional nature. She knew what he had been through, and she tried to tell herself that it was only gratitude, but even as she told herself that, she laughed scornfully.

From the description that had been in the paper she identified the dead man as

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Sergius. She, too, noted that the home of Mr. Northdyke had burned; and also that Marie and Paul Lucka had been assassinated. She saw the terrible hand of Alexis in all that, and for a time she was fearful lest Alexis should seek her out.

On the third day MacDougal was rational. When she was admitted to his room he stared at her unbelievingly, brushed his eyes, and whispered—

"Olga!"

"Yes," she said sweetly, coming to the bed and taking his outstretched hands.

"You came. How did you know I was here?"

She started to say that she had done nothing else but come, and the nurses would probably have told him that she had done nothing else but stay; but Olga checked herself. She loved him, but he was no longer helpless, out of his head. She wanted to throw her arms about him, to feel his arms about her, but she was a woman first and women expect to be won even when they ache to surrender.

"I heard you were here," she replied releasing his hands and taking a chair, "and I thought I would drop in to see you."

"What has happened? I don't remember. They tell me this is Thursday. Monday night—I remember—or maybe I dreamed it. I have had horrible dreams! I was just wondering when you came in if it would be—well—presumptuous of me to write you a note. There were so many things I wanted to ask," he added hastily.

"Presumptuous?" she asked—apparently innocent of what she knew very well was in his mind.

"Yes. Listen, dear lady. It is hard to say what I want to say, but I will be frank. I will be blunt. Perhaps then—then we can—maybe—be friends. I am—am a criminal—not a criminal, but I would be if I were caught——"

Olga did not start or draw in her skirts as he had evidently been afraid she might. She was surprised, but not in the least horrified. In Russia many of one's friends are so-called criminals.

"I have no friends. I do not even dare use my own name. I have no money."

He stopped irresolutely.

She, preserving her attitude of attentive innocence, waited—silently, asking, "Why do you say all this to me?" when she knew very well why, and was intensely thrilled.

"That," he said hopelessly, "is why I can not tell you that I love you!"

She was silent, and looked at him from drooping lids; then after a time, to torment him wickedly, said, ambiguously—

"I am sorry."

"Sorry? Sorry that I have offended you? I know it is presumptuous of me. You are a countess—rich—beautiful——"

"No. I am sorry you can't tell me that, because—I shall be frank too—because I would like very much to have you!"

For some seconds MacDougal leaned forward in the incredulous stupefaction of joy.

"Olga?" he asked rapturously, but still troubled with doubt, as his hand went out toward her.

"My boy, Hugh!" she whispered tensely, springing up and throwing her arms about him as she pressed her lips feverishly, hungrily, against his own.

"Oh, boy, I have done nothing but sit on these hospital steps and wait to see whether you would live or die for three days!"

"Die!" he echoed. "I had no intention of dying! If I had died and found out—ghosts are supposed to find out things like that, aren't they—that you even cared for me, I would have come back. I'd have beaten Lazarus' record."

Then they talked, and laughed, and talked and their voices grew low, descended into whispers, as she told him that Sergius was dead, that Marie and Lucka were dead, and as he told in detail of the mad night he had spent when Alexis suddenly appeared within Sergius' home, and of how Peter had been tortured and Guyot found dead.

"Sergius had killed him," MacDougal said.

But Olga protested that it could not be.

"Guyot was his son! I discovered it that night when we listened there in the tunnel. That is why I was so terribly afraid. I did not tell you for I knew that you could not realize what it meant, but I was desperate to locate Alexis. I knew he could deal with them! You don't think I am cruel, do you? But it was your life or—and I loved you even then! And it was more lives than yours, too.

"Alexis is an awful brute—but he is loyal to the Czar, and loyal men have to be brutes. But let us not talk of that. It is something we both must forget. Tell me

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of yourself. Why have you no friends, Hugh-boy?"

And he told her what he had never told any one, of how, for the sake of his uncle he had pretended to be an embezzler, and became a fugitive that the good and honored name of the uncle, who had been as a father to him might not be tarnished.

"Oh," she said reassuringly, "I would love you if you were as guilty as you have pretended to be! And where does this uncle live?"

"At Albany."

"And what was his name? And your real name? You see, I am a woman and women are inordinately curious."

MacDougal told her.

Then they continued to talk happily for a long time, and reluctantly she arose to go. He said that he could scarcely wait for the morrow to see her and she said:

"Oh, but you will have to wait longer than tomorrow! Indeed, you will. I expect to be out of the city for two or three days. I haven't time to explain now, but I'll tell you all about it when I come back. No. You mustn't become excited. It's bad for you. You must be quiet and rest and when I come back, you will be ready to come out of the hospital! Good-by, beloved one."

OLGA did not know exactly where Albany was, but she had heard of it; and she had swiftly decided that she would find this uncle and require that he make some restitution to the boy. She could see that the mere idea of being a fugitive, though innocent, hung heavily on MacDougal and she wanted him to feel free.

She was gone but one day; and when she came back she found MacDougal dressed and sitting up. The doctor had said that he could leave on the morrow, but MacDougal had not been much cheered up, for he thought continually of Olga, and that she, of all the women in the world, could love him, seemed so impossible that he could not help doubting if he would see her again—even though he scorned the idea that she would be deceitful.

"Now be good and listen," she said. "I have been on a trip—out of the city——"

"Heavens, but do I not know that? I have neither slept nor eaten!"

"Foolish boy. I had a pleasant time. I met a man, and I talked with him——"

"Don't—Olga, please."

"He was a stranger, too," she teased.

"Olga!"

"Yes. A wonderfully pleasant man."

But MacDougal said nothing. He knew she was teasing, but it hurt; and so he smiled and tried not to look jealous.

"He lives at Albany. Yes, at Albany. That is where I went. And Hugh," her voice softened tenderly, "your uncle is dead. It was him I wanted to see. But he is dead. He died a rich man. This man—an attorney he is—that I talked with, told me all about it. After you left—as the embezzler—friends of your uncle sympathized with him for the financial disaster supposedly brought on by the embezzling nephew, and aided him in every way so that he quickly recouped his fortune—and a bigger one, so the attorney said. And your uncle left his estate to you.

"Wait now—I haven't finished. And he included in his will a full confession of just what had happened; and he stipulated that it should be published in the papers. And it was. And detectives have been scouring the earth to find you. I promised that pleasant attorney that I would have you there tomorrow. I knew the news would make you well!"

"Oh, you dear, dear girl! It isn't that news—it is you—just you that have made me well. I feel like a man again—and, it isn't the money—but—you know—it is awful to love some one when you are penniless. Especially when that one is rich."

"Rich? My beloved, it is I who am likely to be penniless. Alexis has been after my property for a long time, and I suspect—and am thankful for it—that he has arranged to get it, without troubling me. I want to be penniless—if I can have you!"

And in the course of time Olga discovered that she was, as far as her own property was concerned, penniless. Alexis, of course, had nothing directly to do with it. But her estates were confiscated by the Czar—who was so soon to lose his own. The way it came about was that the Russian police agents who had heard Peter's story in English, and understood no word of it, reported on their return that Olga had financed Sergius, in whatever mischief he was up to, of her own free will.

But precious little Olga and MacDougal cared for the reports made by the Russian police agents!

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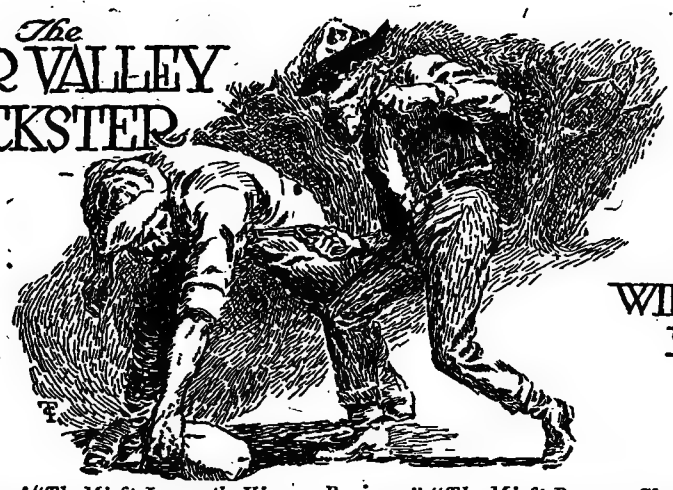
The BEAR VALLEY HUCKSTER



by WILLIAM H. HAMBY

Author of "The Misfit Learns the Vinegar Business," "The Misfit Becomes Chaperon," etc.

THERE may be weirder sounds than a drunken man singing a gospel hymn on a lonesome road at midnight; but if so Calvin Dennis had never heard them.

"On J-o-r-dan's—st-o-r-m-e-e banks I st-a-n-d,
And cast-a wish-ful—ey-e—
O'er C-a-n-na-ann's fair and h-a-p-p-y-e land,
Where my po-shesh-ions li-e e."

The voice came wailingly up the ridge-road ahead.

Cal's shoulder blades hugged together as though to choke off the cold chills from running up and down his back; and he glanced quickly and apprehensively over his shoulders at his sacks of turnips and apples and potatoes in the wagon-box. Then he leaned forward and struck his bony, ratty grays with a long hazel switch which served as a whip, and began to whistle the first thing that came to his lips—also a mournful gospel tune.

"A charge to keep I have——"

He was seven hours late. A wheel had slipped a tire coming down the hill at Kissack's Mills, and he had to wait for the blacksmith to repair the break. It was seven miles yet to the camp and this was the lonesomest part of the road. What was Big Jim saying? Maybe he would think Budd Johnson was right after all.

JUST six days before Calvin had ceased to resist the call of "big things doing" which had come to him for three weeks on the *boom, boom* of the blasts that were cutting a gap through Turkey Ridge twelve miles to the west. He had loaded the old rickety wagon with apples and potatoes and turnips, for he had heard the gang over there was the eatenest set one ever saw; and drove into the camp, where three hundred men with horses and shovels and picks and crowbars—with dynamite, with sweat and shouts and oaths, were grading and blasting and digging—building a section of the first railroad ever to come within fifty miles of Turkey Ridge.

One of the water-carriers helping himself to two of Calvin's apples had told him Jim Sullivan—"Big Jim,"—was the contractor and the real boss; but Budd Johnson—"that feller yonder with the long turkey-red neck"—was boss of the teamsters. Calvin knew Johnson. He owned a farm not far from the Dennis place and raised mules. They said he was working twenty of them on this job.

"Hello, Budd." Young Dennis had left his wagon and approached the red-necked, sweating mule-boss.

"Hello, Cal." He hardly looked around and didn't seem at all friendly.

"I want to see Mr. Sullivan," said Calvin not timidly, but deferentially to one in authority.

"He's busy, but I'll see," said Johnson directly. "What you want?"

"Oh, just to see him." He knew Budd would not give him a job.

Johnson crossed the dump to a small hastily built shack fifty yards beyond. Calvin followed a little distance behind, and heard Budd say:

"Sullivan, there's a pindlin' boob over from my neighborhood out there wants to

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see you. He ain't no good—couldn't push a jay bird off a limb, and his old piebald team could not pull up a sassafras root. But I reckon he wants a job."

"What's his name?" asked Big Jim looking up from a board-table where he had been figuring.

"Dennis."

"Send him in," was the brief order; and Calvin's heart beat fast, and warmed toward Big Jim.

No man minds so much to be turned down for real reasons, but it stirs all his resentment to be brushed aside without a hearing. And Big Jim was not a fellow to do that.

"Hello," he looked up as Calvin—tall, lean, a typical hill-billy with the eyes of a hunter and the mouth of a poet—came through the door. "What's eating you?"

He was rough, but friendly.

"Nothing," grinned Calvin, "I got something to eaten you—got some good apples and good turnips and stuff out there to sell. But that ain't mostly what I came for—I want a job."

Big Jim glanced him over once more—and shook his head.

"Too light for our sort of work—must have good stuff in you, or you wouldn't be named Dennis—but too light. This job is for bull-necks and red-necks and tough-necks. Let's go see your stuff."

As they crossed the works to the wagon he talked to Cal about what he was doing in a regular man-to-man way:

"Have contract for three miles here—one of the toughest jobs on the whole line. Gang of Italians at the camp east—five miles down there. That signal means a blast. Look out—get behind a tree."

At the wagon he ran an appraising hungry eye over the red apples and yellow sweet potatoes.

"I'll take your stuff. How much is it worth?"

"About three dollars," said Calvin.

"I'll make it five." He took a bill from his pocket. "Unload it at the cook-tent."

Big Jim turned away and started back to headquarters; but stopped and looked around again at the old wagon, the ratty grays, and the disreputable harness. For about thirty seconds—a long time for Big Jim—he considered, then called—

"Dennis, come back to my office when you have unloaded."

Cal had gone back to Big Jim's shack with freshly beating heart. Was he to get a job after all?

"You are honest," Big Jim commented studying him more closely than before.

Calvin shook his head.

"Oh, no, I merely look honest. I get most of the early ripe watermelons in the neighborhood, and the other fellows get the blame."

Big Jim threw up his head and laughed.

"Well, I say you are honest anyway."

And then Big Jim had made him a proposition that had brought the blood pumping into his head and a swelling into his throat.

"Are you willing to risk it?" asked Big Jim.

"Sure," and Dennis nodded with glowing eyes.

"It is forty miles to Springfield. With your team it will take four days; two days there and two back. I want you to start day after tomorrow."

And when Big Jim had taken him into the lean-to back of the shack, and given him a gun, the beauty and weight and effectiveness of which fairly made Calvin gloat.

AND that was why this mournful drunkard's singing on the lonely road at midnight made the creeps go up and down Dennis' back. For two days and seven hours he had been alert as a frightened deer, while keeping a sleepy, careless air. For what Big Jim had told him was this: he must pay his men every two weeks in cash. The cash had to be brought from the bank at Springfield. That twice he had sent five men as armed guards, but now word had come that a band of a dozen robbers were organized, and watching the roads.

So he had proposed that Dennis take his old vegetable wagon to Springfield; pretend to be huckstering both ways; and bring back the five thousand dollars in bills and coin. For every safe trip he made he was to have fifty dollars in gold.

"Oh, sin-ner—come h-o-m-e——"

The drunken rider was now in sight, reeling from side to side of the saddle and singing with maudlin fervor to the flickering moonlight that filtered through the overlapping limbs.

Dennis again switched his horses and

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jumped up as though half asleep on the old seat. But his heart was beating and his eyes alert. There was something in that bulky drunken rider, oddly familiar.

"By thunder!" Calvin said under his breath, "it is Budd Johnson, I wonder——".

But the rider was alongside the wagon; and reeling over the front wheel, said in a low, swift, perfectly sober tone:

"Get rid of the stuff quick—they are laying for you at the creek. Some of the gang following behind. They'll search the wagon sure."

With that Budd reeled to the other side of the saddle, lifted up a drunken voice:

"Good-by, Dolly, I must l-e-a-ve you——"

Away he went wabbling and singing on down the lonesome Ridge road.

For a moment Calvin felt as though his whole body had been soused into a tub of ammonia; and then a thousand tingling pin-pricks jabbed his skin. But his head was working, and he began to cluck at his grays until they broke into a tired trot.

The one house on this lonesome eleven miles from Kissack's Mills to the camp, was just at the foot of the ridge ahead—and there was a turnip patch beside the road. He would wait until he got there for he might be watched.

Cal wondered how they had suspected him of having the money. He had not told a soul. And at Springfield he had carefully carried out instructions. He had got Sullivan's letter to the bank without any one seeing him do it. The cashier had taken the money to his house, and passed it over in a gunny-sack to the huckster while buying apples. All the way he had played the part of a shiftless huckster on the road both going and coming so perfectly no one could have suspected him of having either sense or money in his possession.

Cal stopped his wagon in the road beside the turnip patch; and skinned over the rail-fence with a sack under his arm. For five minutes he pulled turnips, stuffing the tops and all into his sack. Then, with the sack of turnips and that containing the money showing as one in his hand, he paused among the weeds at the edge of the patch and looked toward the house as though listening for the farmer. He dropped the sacks and crouched a moment, swiftly hiding the small bag of money in the weeds, then rose up with the turnips on his shoulder, scrambled over the fence, threw them into his wagon, got on to the seat and began plying his hazel switch.

A half-mile farther the road entered the dense bottom woods, and turning south crossed Turkey Creek. The moon was now almost down and every dark shape looked like a man beside the road.

Cal drove on slowly, hiding with perfect unconcern the cold terror that gripped him. Would the robbers shoot first, and search the wagon afterwards—or would they merely hold him up. Two dead men in past years had been picked up beside that creek.

Suddenly three black shapes detached themselves from the underbrush and stepped into the road, and one he heard behind. Two of them leveled double-barreled shotguns at him.

"Hands up."

Cal obeyed. They were not going to kill him after all. And with the thought of his clever hiding of the money his courage flowed back in a warm—almost hilarious current through his veins.

"I reckon," he said amusedly, "you fellows must be pretty hungry to hold up a man for a bushel of turnips. Help yourselves, but don't let them shotguns get to goin'."

The robbers were not masked. They had merely tied handkerchiefs loosely over the lower parts of their faces, and pulled their slouch hats down.

"Don't get funny, kid," said the leader, approaching the side of the wagon, and scrabbling among the sacks, "We are after the coin—and want it mighty —— quick. Where is it?"

"Hanged if I know anything about coin," said Cal nonchalantly. "That's what I've been after all my life—but I ain't never yet found enough to be worth a load of turkey shot. You are welcome to all I got—and an apple throwed in. Help yourselves."

They turned the sacks upside down—swore a good deal, but soon gave it up.

"Reckon we got the wrong one," said the leader. "Move on, you bean-pole, and don't bother to come back."

Cal whipped his grays into a trot. He looked back several times to be sure he was not followed. A quarter of a mile beyond the creek he turned out of the road into the edge of the timber, hitched his horses to a

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tree, and cut through the woods back toward the turnip patch. The road made a bend, and it was a little more than a half-mile by the short-cut. Cal had the instinct of an Indian—and needed no path. He figured that the robbers would either lie in wait for some other possible messenger, or else scatter and go home. In either case he would have a chance to get back and recover the money without being seen.

He approached the turnip patch from the woods-side—and listened long and carefully. The greatest danger was the robbers might be returning this way. But there was not a sound on the road. Not a stir, but of the rustling October wind. With heart pounding, he rose up and skinned swiftly over the fence. Stooping low to be hidden by the thick weeds along the fence-row, he ran slinkingly around the patch to where he had hidden the sack of coin and bills. He had marked the place by a big rail, the end of which had been burned.

The sack was gone!

Wildly Cal searched, on hands and knees among the weeds along the fence for two or three rods—hoping he had mistaken the place. No, the bag of money was gone.

It was Budd Johnson. Budd had tricked him. He was the only one who knew that Big Jim had employed Cal—and he had guessed what it was for.

Yes, and Johnson was in cahoots with the gang. That was why they had searched his wagon so carelessly, and let him go so easily. They knew Budd already had the money.

A COLD, still rage possessed Dennis. He crouched there in the weeds gnawing his teeth—thinking. He was ruined, disgraced. He had failed in his trust, failed Big Jim—and all through the treachery of a man who pretended to warn him as a friend.

Cal was twenty-three years old and he had not had a fight since he was a chunk of a boy. He was too fair and good-natured, and people liked him too well to fight him. He had felt shudders and cold chills as he drove along the lonesome night road with five thousand dollars in his keeping. His beating heart had almost suffocated him when the robbers first stepped into the road. But now, everything in him seemed blowing like oxygen through a pipe upon one red, red thought:

"They have taken it away from me. It doesn't belong to them. They are laughing at how they tricked me. They shan't do it! They shan't do it—not without something happening."

He rose up on his knees, started to get up—but heard voices and slipped back.

The men were coming up the road, up from toward the creek. These were members of the robber-gang. They had waited for Johnson to have time to get away with the coin—and now they were going to meet him at some rendezvous and divide it.

Cal listened closely as they came nearer. He did not recognize their voices, but knew they were all men who lived in the hills. Bad men upon whom suspicion had long rested, but on whom conviction had never fastened.

One of them laughed as they passed along the road not ten feet from Cal crouching in the corner of the rail fence.

"That was the easiest job I ever helped pull off."

"Yeh," said the other, "like takin' candy from a blind baby. Don't reckon Budd'll try any funny business in the dividin', do you?"

"Nope, Budd remembers what happened to Bill Hicks."

Hicks, Cal knew, was one of the dead men found beside the ford at Turkey Creek. And he knew too the same fate awaited any other men who discovered evidence against the gang that might betray them into the hands of the law.

But Cal's mind was not upon fate, but on that bag of coin which traitor Budd Johnson held somewhere there in the woods to divide among these robbers.

He parted the weeds cautiously and got a look through the fence as they passed on up the road. The light was dim, and he could not recognize either of them. They still had handkerchiefs over the lower part of their faces.

There was the crunch of gravel and voices lower and less reckless coming up the road again. It was the two other robbers. Five in all with Johnson—a thousand dollars apiece. It was a good night's haul.

The red determination that burned up fear but not caution, suddenly flamed into a plan. Cal whipped out a large light-colored bandanna handkerchief, drew it across the bridge of his nose so it hung loosely over the lower part of his face, and

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knotted it behind his head. Then he slithered over the rail-fence as noiselessly as a lizard and started walking leisurely up the middle of the road.

If the two ahead looked back, reasoned Cal, they would see the mask and think the two behind had split company and were going it alone for safety. And if the two behind saw him, they would think the same thing.

But if they didn't think that—then there would be the crack of a gun—and he would get the money back. Cal was not thinking of himself, but of the job ahead of him. Danger did not mean chances of getting killed, but chances of letting them get away with the money.

The moon was behind the tree-tops now, and the road in long shadows. A hundred yards ahead the two dark forms moved leisurely along the road, and occasionally the sound of a voice came back. Behind him a hundred and fifty yards came the other two dark forms.

The night was very still save for an occasional half-tired gust of Autumn wind that shook the drooping leaves loose from trees, *woofed* a minute in the limbs, and then tiredly sighed itself into stillness again.

For a half-mile Cal walked on, keeping about an even distance between the braces of bandits. And then he noticed the two ahead were slowing up—he was getting closer to them; and the two behind were walking faster—they were getting closer to him.

It was growing dangerous. He was in easy gunshot range of either of them. But he could not drop out. He must see which way they turned—for he had to get to Budd Johnson first.

At the top of the ridge the road bent sharply and the two robbers ahead were lost from sight.

Crunch! Crunch! The heavy steps behind him were hitting the road faster. They were within fifty yards now, and had entirely ceased talking. Cal fancied they had grown suspicious and were watching him.

He wished the bend was not in the road here. If he was only sure the two were far enough ahead: but he quickened his step anyway.

At the turn of the road was a dense clump of oak sprouts and hazel brush. When he reached it he paused a second and glanced back. The two behind had gained on him, and were almost running. The moon was down now, only shapes showed. He laid his hand on his gun ready—hesitated only a fleeting moment—and walked on around the clump of brush. There, in the road not twenty yards away, stood the two other bandits with shotgun barrels ready to be lifted at the move of a hand.

"Hello," Cal said gruffly, acting without any conscious direction of his mind, "are you the fellows that was to git that barrel of whisky from me?"

For a moment the two bandits looked at each other, then one laughed and spoke in a disguised voice.

"You bet—where is it?"

"Just beyond the sycamore, down where the road crosses the gulley. I'll roll it up to the edge of the road—and you leave the money under the rock like you said. Where is your wagon?"

"It is coming," said the one who laughed. "Get your whisky up—and we'll leave the money."

And Cal walked by, not looking back. If they did not believe him—they would shoot him in the back.

Every step he counted, thinking—

"Now, I'm one yard further away—ten—twelve—fourteen."

A gust of wind came again and *woofed* among the trees! Still no gun fired.

"Fifteen—twenty—twenty-five—thirty. Now," he thought wildly, "I have a chance—forty—fifty."

They had not shot nor started to follow.

"They believed me," he said with a feeling of relief that turned him giddy.

He staggered, looked back.

The four were together talking. He knew now that dim road to the right was the one they were to follow to Budd Johnson.

He walked close to the edge of the road—safely out of sight, dodged into the woods—and started at a light run diagonally across to head them off.

There would be no lingering now that the robbers were on the unused side road. They would be in a hurry to get and hide their share of the spoils.

Cal knew that road angled to the northwest, and he went down the side of the ridge like a mountain goat. From long experience as a hunter, he knew how to cover ground and make little noise. It was a

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race for Budd Johnson, with four to one in their favor, for he had only guesses and they knew. Twice he stopped to listen. They were coming down the dim side-road, and he was ahead of them. When he got to the road they were a hundred yards back.

A noise now would be fatal, even more fatal than being late. He skirted the road, keeping in the edge of the timber, and slipped swiftly, noiselessly.

He stopped at a straight stretch of the road and from the shelter of a tree looked back. The four were just passing the glade a hundred and fifty yards back. He was gaining.

At the next bend he came out openly into the road. It was an old disused timber road with grass grown up in the center, and underbrush crowding the ancient wagon-tracks, and limbs touched overhead.

THE moon was down now, and only the dim starlight made shapes visible. Cal was going forward openly, but his feet fell as stealthily as a deer-stalker.

A stamp of a hoof startled him. There was a restless movement at the edge of the brush. It was a horse hitched—Budd Johnson's horse.

Cal's heart beat fast and hard, not with fear, but with the almost unbearable tension of the big-game hunter as he approaches a shot.

Johnson was near. But which way? He would be in the safest place—trust him for that, and he would shoot—and shoot in an instant if his suspicion was aroused.

Cal stopped in the road a moment to listen. There was no sound but the faint brushing breath of the wind, and once more the stamp of the horse, restless at the hitching-post. Yes—from behind unmistakably was the sound of approaching feet. The four robbers were near.

Cal moved ahead with more swiftness this time. Johnson, he reasoned, would be at a safe distance from his horse, but in sight of the road. Yes, he would be in the shelter of a tree, and it would be some notable tree that the four could have agreed upon as a certain meeting-place. Just ahead, the old road turned sharply to the left, and to the right in an open spot was a huge dead black oak with its gaunt limbs standing out high above the rest of the woods against the dim sky.

With certain instinct Cal knew that was the place, and turned toward it as surely and casually as though he had been one of the gang.

There was a slight movement behind the dead tree. Budd Johnson was watching his approach.

Again Cal's heart beat so hard the veins in his neck ached. He had staked all on Johnson expecting the gang to scatter, and gather one at a time—and it was so dark it would not be easy to tell one masked man from another. But if Johnson did discover the difference before he got to him....

"Who's that?"

Johnson had stepped almost clear of the tree. The tone told Cal he did not suspect. And that this was merely an agreed upon signal of recognition.

"*Sshl*" Cal signaled for silence, and raised his left hand in a hurried desperate warning, as though a posse was on their tracks.

And at that instant came the crunch of gravel back up the road.

In a sudden panic Johnson stooped to grab up the sack of coin. And as he straightened up a barrel of a nine-inch revolver touched his side.

"Move or speak and you are dead!"

The intense still anger Cal had felt from the first now spoke in his tones with such biting decision there was no moment of doubt. He would kill Johnson without an instant's hesitancy if necessary.

"Turn your back," he ordered.

Johnson obeyed.

"Go forward as I order—one step too fast—one signal and I'll kill you as sure as there's a hell waitin' for you."

Budd Johnson never hesitated a moment. He walked exactly as his guide ordered—slowly, cautiously—fifty—a hundred, two hundred yards.

"Now drop the coin," Cal ordered, and the sack went to the earth with a thump. "Up with your hands."

With the gun against his back, he went through Budd's pockets for his knife and gun.

Then slinging the bag of money over his left shoulder, the gun in his right pointed constantly at his prisoner's back, he marched Johnson through the woods, over the ridge, down back of the turnip patch and around to his wagon.

"Get on the seat and drive."

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Sitting behind on a bag of turnips with the sack of coin between his feet he held the gun ready for any emergency while Budd Johnson drove the ratty grays with more caution than he had ever driven a span of his own mules. It was almost daylight as they came in sight of the camp.

"Now," said Cal, "Since I have got the money back, I don't really want to kill you, Budd, nor I don't care particular about the sheriff gettin' you. I guess I'll turn you loose, and let your gang do it. They'll sure think you double-crossed them and they'll do a much better job of it than the sheriff. So hop off and hit it back down the road there in the direction of your own sort."

There was a light in Big Jim's shack as Cal drove up. Big Jim was up, and had been for several hours.

"Been held up?" Big Jim asked, coming out to the wagon.

"Yep," replied Cal.

"I got worried when you did not get back by midnight. Sent out a posse, but they went the south road.

"Glad they didn't get you too—I reckon I can stand the loss."

"There ain't no loss," said Cal with dry satisfaction, "not of coin. But I reckon you've lost a mule-skinner."

Big Jim almost pounded the breath out of Cal as he took the sack of coin.

"You good kid, you splendid kid! But what about the mule boss—what has happened to Johnson?"

"Nothin'" said Cal. "Not yit. But he'll either be in the Indian Territory in three days — or in Turkey Creek."

THE WHITE MAN of BORNEO

by GORDON McCREAGH

Author of "Sense of Balance," "The Honor of the Escadrille," etc.

MR. HAZLETON of the New York Trading Company sat in his little teak-built office in Bulungan and frowned over the intricacies of a Dutch customs invoice. Presently he got up and from a safe inordinately large and secure-looking for so small an office, he took nothing more exciting than a letter. He pored over it and puckered his lips while he tapped on its edge with a pencil; for the letter dealt with things far bigger than the mere collecting of hardwood lumber. This quiet trader-man on the outer edge of civilization was a far-flung tendril of an immense system; he was in confidential touch with certain great ones who in turn were in touch with certain greater ones in Washington.

A Malay boy entered from the door behind him and made obeisance.

"*Orang tabbe shide, pya Dic-ing-sing.*"

"Ha, good! *Salamat pyan-de.*"

Mr. Hazleton turned again to his letter and frowned some more. After a minute or so he suddenly banged impatiently on a call-bell. The boy slipped in silently as before.

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"Didn't I tell you to show the white lord in?" Hazleton grumbled without looking up.

An easy drawl answered him from behind his chair.

"Been waiting quite some time, Mr. Hazleton."

The other wheeled in a flash and gaped at the man who stood in the room. He was tall and wiry, gaunt and fearfully sun-tanned, and he had storm-cloudy gray eyes which expressed nothing at all, but the hard-lined mouth grinned with boyish enjoyment at Hazleton's surprise.

"Darn you, Mr. Dickinson. I might ha' known you'd just drift in like one of your beastly leopards or something. Sit right down and have a peg—oh, I forgot; a cheroot then? Real American goods; none o' these Dutch *cabajas pomposas*. I heard you were in; brought down a young rhino. Is that right?"

"*M-mh*," grunted Dickinson casually; for the trapping and transporting of a ton and a half of wild fighting rhinoceros was a matter of insignificant interest compared to a real white man's cigar.

He lit it with reverent care and inhaled for a moment of blissful content.

Then he inquired with disconcerting bluntness—

"What d'you want me to do?"

Hazleton was taken back with the directness of it; then he laughed.

"You're so darned abrupt," he murmured. "But—well, there is something you can do for me." He pulled open a drawer and took from it a paper twist of an earthy-reddish granular substance. "D'you know what this is?"

Dickinson looked at the stuff and smelled it; then he ground a small portion of it in his palm.

"Sure I know what it is. That's what the hill tribes call devil's blood; they mix it with betel oil and make a vermilion paint which they use for their *bura umbo* ceremony, the big killing. They get it somewhere up the Palimpok River which hits this Kayan way up above Anambong."

"Ha, you've heard of it then," exclaimed Hazleton with quick interest. "Well, that's what I'm after. I want you to quit your animal hunting for a spell and go up and locate that deposit; and I'm authorized to pay any expense money you want."

Dickinson puffed in luxurious contentment and shook his head.

"You can't pay me to go into that country, Mr. Hazleton, not with all the money in Mynheer Schluyter's bank. Man, the Palimpok rises in the Iran foothills and those folks are Murut tribes and Dusuns, merry little jesters who'd like to stick my head on a painted bamboo pole and get drunk 'round it."

Hazleton was not at all dismayed. He grinned back at the lean jungle-man with confident knowledge.

"For all that, my friend, you'll go. First, because you're the only man in Borneo who can do it."

Dickinson spoke with eyes closed, leaning far back in an ecstasy of enjoyment.

"Flattery don't hurt me any, pile it on."

"Secondly," continued Hazleton without the least anxiety. "This stuff is more than just 'devil's blood,' it's cinnabar, and of a very high grade."

"Do tell. Well, ain't that exciting."

"Cinnabar," went on Hazleton evenly, "is a sulfid of mercury, and there isn't any too much of it in the world. Mercury is used for making fulminating caps; and—Uncle Sam needs fulminating caps just now; needs 'em bad!"

Dickinson opened his eyes and blew two slow smoke rings at the ceiling; then one after another he lowered his long legs from the edge of the desk. He sat all splayed out with his shoulders hunched up to his ears for a full minute; then with laborious deliberation he pushed his body upright and grunted:

"Huh!" And after an interval, "——!" And then, "Well— for the sake of this cigar—gimme the sordid details."

Hazleton laughed contentedly and reached out his hand.

HALF an hour later Dickinson left the office and strode lankily up the sweating street, keeping in the shadow of the buildings. Immediately two figures darted out of the little shop across the way and hurried after him. One was tall and of a sinewy build with a complexion which was dark even for that sun-smitten country; the other, shorter and sturdier, had a fair florid face. Both were rounded off with the comfortable sleekness of a land where servants are cheap and the heat is an incentive to many whisky pegs. They had almost to run to catch up with the other's long, lithe stride.

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"Hallo there, Mynheer Dickinson! Slow up a minute, won't you!"

The big man overtook him and laid a hand familiarly on his shoulder. He mopped his face with his handkerchief.

"Phe-ew! You're so awflee energetic. I say, man, we were looking for you as soon as we heard you were come in. We have a fine proposition for you."

Dickinson looked sourly at the pair and dropped his shoulder to let the offending hand slide off.

"I'm not looking at any propositions just now," he said without enthusiasm.

"Ah, but my verree dear friend, when you hear it! Listen—Hendricks writes from Amsterdam that he has a client who offers two thousand dollars Straits for *Dendrobium albocinctum!* What d'you think of that? That is big price for an orchid nowadays; and it's just made for you; you knew Schöneman before the fever got him and you knew his ground on the Little Dyak River."

Dickinson smiled with half-shut eyes in which the pupils were contracted like a parrot's—he always did that when he was going to be particularly unpleasant. He pressed his pith helmet firmly on to his head and buttoned the lowest button of his tussor silk coat in agreeable anticipation.

"Now then," he began pleasantly. "To start with, Iacopoulos, I don't believe you. I told you a year ago in Malay Pembe's dive in Banjermasin that you were a liar from four generations back; and you had the all-fired gall to try and pull a knife on me—by the way, you never thanked me for not breaking your arm. To go on with, you're a crook; so's Speckbrock, and the two of you'd swindle a wahwah monkey for a yam. Now that's flat, and how about it?"

Dickinson stood swaying on his feet like a great lank stork and grinned at them in cheerful readiness. But neither of them seemed anxious to take offense. Iacopoulos only smiled with conciliatory nervousness.

"Oah, what use of remembering old differences, Mynheer Dickinson. This is business, and verree good. Look, we finance the trip and we take only a half-share; and further to secure you we deposit your half in the bank before we start; if we find the orchid it is paid to you at once. Now that is fair, is it not?"

"Huh! Too darn fair! Mighty anxious to get me up the Little Dyak, ain't you."

"It is a gift, Mynheer, I know; but you see, you know Schöneman's old ground."

It sounded plausible; but it certainly was too fair and above-board for the pair as Dickinson knew them. He flouted the explanation with cheerful insult.

"You're lying like a green tree-toad again. Speckbrock knew Schöneman as well as I did; better, 'cause Schöneman was an old crook too. And what's more, I don't believe it was fever that got him; I believe one of you framed his Ilongote woman to put *ghela* bean in his coffee. And any way, I'd rather go in on a proposition with a web-toed Kling than with the two of you. So now you know."

The long, bony jungle-man waited with smiling truculence for a full minute; but there was such an overpowering impression of confidence in his attitude that the other two felt the wisdom of discretion. The tall swarthy one still smiled ingratiatingly, while the sturdy flordid one only scowled. Dickinson clucked with disappointment and nodded sourly at them; then with supreme scorn he turned his back.

"Well, so long, fellers," he called over his shoulder. "Hope to see you dead some day." And he strode off to the office of the Navigazions Maatschappij to arrange for a passage by the little river steamboat as far as Anambong.

ANAMBONG on the Kayan River is the last timid thrust of a wavering civilization into the steamy silence of the jungle which crowds all 'round it and reaches out vivid lushy fingers in a constant battle to push the little settlement back into the oozy stream from which it came. A little guard-house and barrack for a dozen or so of Dyak military police with a pale young Dutch officer, a few traders' bungalows perched on stilts high above the level of the miasmatic mists, and a stockade of pointed saplings which even the ax can not destroy in that rich moist mud, for they sprout green twigs as they stand. That is all.

Outside the stockade is a fringe of bamboo wattle-and-daub huts which the jungle hangs hungrily over. The place is so still and lifeless that one can almost hear the green tendrils growing and crowding in on the huts. Everybody drowses through the

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day in a perpetual sweat-bath and wakes up only to take quinin pills and then drowses again.

Dickinson struck this somnolent cemetery like a cyclone. With a strenuous energy which amazed and disgusted the residents he ravened up and down and through the settlement, collecting men and equipment and supplies. For three days he was the bane of the place, and then, amid a shouting of men and a bustle such as had never been known in all its history, he sped up-river seated in the middle of an eighteen-foot *gobang* with six naked River Dyaks paddling in sturdy rhythm while a seventh crouched behind him holding a white umbrella over his head. Then everybody sent their curses after him and went back to sleep.

Dickinson's passage up the Kayan River and into the Palimpok was easy to follow. It was marked by a trail of startled Dyak villages which spoke wonderingly of an *orang tabbe maklul*, a lunatic white lord, who descended upon them like a storm, and swore fearsomely in Malay, and demanded information and supplies on the instant—and got them. Never had a white lord so pursued by devils been seen on the Palimpok before. And Dickinson sweated and grinned and drove, and made the best time on record.

But presently, after a few days of repetition, all this talk about devils began to react on the nerves of his Dyaks. Existing, as they did, on the fringe of the vast, silent, sunless jungle, their lives were haunted by a host of lurking *antus* who waited in the damp darknesses to work their malice on them. Why, then, would this *tabbe* be speeding up the river with such fierce haste if it were not to escape from some particularly malignant devils of his own which pursued him? And then there began to come vague confirmatory hints.

Villages would know in advance of their coming, advised by that swift word-of-mouth relay system which astonishes white men in the jungles all the world over, and there would be whispered stories of something which followed ever relentlessly behind.

The Dyaks began to grow restless. They were little brown sturdy fellows with small monkey eyes which were amazingly resolute. Most of them were pirates by profession and they were plucky enough, but this hazy devil-talk was fearsome to them by reason of their birthright. Anyway, this white lord was entirely too strenuous. Others whom they had known had been content to camp often and long during the heat of the day, but this altogether crazy one expected them to be as energetic as himself, which was manifestly impossible. Furthermore, they did not at all like this foolish journeying into the hill country of the Muruts.

They began to sulk and make difficulties; the further up-stream they reached the more anxious they were to delay. It was a question whether they were more afraid of the devils that followed or of the Muruts ahead. Finally even Dickinson was forced to call a halt. The stream began to be too swift for canoe navigation. They made no more than a dozen miles during the day. They had arrived at the beginning of jungle travel, which was the beginning of danger.

Dickinson chose an oozy side-creek which the overhanging lianas made into a dark tunnel and ran the *gobang* into it. Fastened with cane withes and hidden with trailing orchid ropes, it would be secure with its surplus of supplies against his return. That night he camped with unusual care, for this was now "bad country." When he had eaten a curry of monitor lizard—which is more tender than chicken—he called his men to him. They came and squatted before him like shiny brown toads dimly outlined by the firelight. Dickinson sat on a duffle bag and addressed himself to Tha-Na-Gung, his umbrella-bearer.

In his many wanderings he had learned the native character well enough to know that the only satisfactory way of dealing with them was through a head man; he knew just how to work on their simple minds with exhortation and a little praise and many promises and finally, with gifts. At the exact psychological moment when he could see that he had brought them to that state bordering on hero worship which every true leader of primitive men knows how to inspire, he stopped with dramatic abruptness.

"Tha-Na-Gung, bring me now the long bundle wrapped in nipa matting."

The Dyaks eyes popped. That long heavy bundle had been an object of silent curiosity at every camp. Very deliberately Dickinson cut the cane bindings and unrolled it on his knees. It clanked softly. The Dyaks heaved up on their haunches.

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With practised cunning Dickinson held them in excruciating suspense while he told the head man that he had been acquainted with mias apes who had been better boatmen; but that they had not been such very bad boys after all. They made little clucking sounds of deprecation. Then with a flourish Dickinson threw the last wrapping from the bundle and laid bare seven well-balanced glittering krises with bolo-wood handles.

"One for each man, Tha-Na-Gung; that with the inlaid grip for thee. And let them be sharp, for use may arrive. *Bassi.* Ye have my leave to go."

At that moment the little brown men would have died for him. Such weapons were what their piratical souls lusted for. They spent the rest of the night putting razor-edges to the blades and comparing with each other like joyous schoolboys. And Dickinson crawled into his tiny green waterproof tent and slept, content that for that night at any rate no sentinels need be posted.

THE next morning the jungle swallowed them. Hot, steamy, suffocating jungle of tropical Borneo, with never a break in the monstrous labyrinthine vegetation through which men who dare its depths must stoop and crawl and dodge in a perpetual twilight which is like the dimness of deep water. In this tangled maze it was Dickinson's hope, by traveling with infinite care, to avoid discovery and to work his way up the banks of the river till tracks through the more open *rukh* of the higher slopes would indicate the comings and goings of the head-hunter folk and would eventually lead to the deposits which he was looking for. For an experienced jungle-hunter like himself the plan was by no means a hopeless one.

But things went wrong from the very start. The Dyaks were restless and needed interminable watching. It was not what was before them in prospect that worried them; they would have followed this masterful white man into a whole village full of head-hunters. But they kept casting fearful looks behind them into the shadows, and they were ready to break and bolt at the least excuse.

"Devils!" they muttered tremulously.

The *antus* of the white man were following on the trail; they could feel it in their skins. Dickinson, lean and watchful as a leopard, could see nothing, hear nothing; but his most palatable reasonings were of no avail against the superstitions of these child-minded river-men.

That day they made less than ten miles; but they camped finally on the first long slope of the foothills.

And that night an *antu* stole one of the new krises!

The head man moaned a terrified tale of weird fancy to Dickinson. What else could it have been but an *antu*, he maintained; for each of the three sentries whom he had personally posted to relieve each other through the night swore that no living thing had been seen. Dickinson's eyes became narrow slits and his mouth hardened.

"*Antu*,——!" he muttered.

He knew that the men, all seven of them, had huddled together with their heads under a single bark-cloth blanket to prevent the cold, clammy *gapo-gapo* devils from dropping on to the backs of their necks from the trees. He stood nodding his head slowly with his face set in a hard wooden mask, for he was thinking swiftly and deciding momentous things. It meant, of course, that they had been discovered by the hillmen. Yes, he nodded vigorously, that was it. And yet—funny—it was inconceivable that a prowling Murut would have been content to make off without blowing at least one slender sliver of poisoned bamboo from his *sumpitan* at the sleeping figures. Dickinson was puzzled.

Well, there was no profit in standing and thinking, he decided quickly. Maybe a quick move might shake the trailer off. He broke camp with a speed which astonished even his Dyaks and set the direction up the long ridge on which they had stood. He drove them mercilessly that day; and as they toiled higher, and the crawly damp undergrowth with its myriad of entangling creepers began to give place to rank *cogon* grass and bamboo and cane, he drove them worse than before. That night they camped in a little hollow of rocks four thousand feet up on the ridge; they were well into the heart of the Murut country now.

And that night the *antu* stole Dickinson's compass!

Dickinson was not a man given to wild outbursts of righteous wrath or to useless mouthings. In fact, he smiled this time

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when he heard the tale, for a weight had been lifted from his mind. No wild hill-man had discovered them and done this thing, he was sure. A Murut would have regarded the strange instrument with its wavering ghostly needle as high white man's fetish and would have left it fearsomely alone.

He couldn't quite get to the bottom of the thing all at once; but it was clear that one of his own men for some reason was trying to frighten the rest so that they would refuse to go forward and he would have to abandon his quest. He smiled a little wider at the thought, a thin smile with no mirth in it; and for the first time he addressed his men direct.

"The road lies up this ridge," he said in a voice which purred like a black panther. "And to-night, if an *antu* visits, the three who watch will eat stick. *Bassi.* Go."

Old residents of Borneo who know the natives say that Dyaks can not be beaten as certain lesser breeds, for they turn and kill. Yet each of these seven felt it in his skin that this quiet *tabbe maklul* who smiled so terribly would most assuredly beat all three of the watchers together, and they knew further that they would never attempt to stab him as he smote. It was a direful dilemma for them, for their fear of the *antu* was great.

They settled it in true Dyak manner—which is the manner of native porters all the world over. Dickinson was scouting warily ahead, following a well-defined track through ten-foot high *cogon* grass. He crept cautiously 'round a bend in the trail and then hurried along the next little stretch of open pathway. He came to the next turn and was immediately aware that something was lacking—there was no soft pat of naked feet behind him!

He knew instinctively what had happened. He strode back to the bend. The path stretched silent and empty before him! Only the still quivering breaks in the wall of *cogon* stems showed where his men had swiftly effaced themselves.

His first fleeting impulse was to follow. Then he stopped and shrugged his wide bony shoulders. Of what use? He might follow and catch one of them; but the rest had scattered in all directions. He laughed grimly to himself.

"—— little fools!" he muttered. "Wonder what in —— the game has been? Well, guess it's better anyhow. Guess I can hide up alone a heap better than with the whole crowd."

A cheerful optimist was this long, hard-faced Yank. That word "alone" which had sent so many men stark howling crazy in the soul-searing jungle of Borneo meant nothing to him beyond perhaps a little inconvenience. He thanked his stars heathenishly that he had never fallen into the white man's habit of letting a head porter carry his weapons and his tent—that little green mosquito-proof tent which folded into such a comfortable rucksack and meant so much to his health. He shrugged his shoulders again and turned up the path. Somehow the idea of turning back had never come to him.

IT WAS evening before he began suddenly to ask himself whether there might not after all be something more than mere superstition in this talk of something following. As he glided along the narrow, walled-in trail he sensed rather than heard, something approaching. Immediately, without a sound, he melted into the tall grass and stood like an image holding his breath.

Yes, he was right. A soft *pad pad* of naked feet came down the slope. In another second they had come 'round the bend, two small, burned-umber men with shrivelled up monkey faces

They were naked except for a vermilion painted fish-bone pattern down the front of their bodies and black charcoal streaks across their brows and cheeks. They wore armlets and knee bands of white cowrie shells and red *kopo* seeds, and each carried a *parang* and a *sumpitan* blow-gun. They trotted carelessly, obviously aiming for some point farther back on the trail. Dickinson could have touched them as they passed, and he looked with interest at their vermilion paint.

"Now what the ——?" he said to himself. "Painted up for a killing and going easy. Who the devil are they after?"

He came cautiously from his hiding-place and crept on with greater care than ever, turning the problem over in his mind. Presently he was forced to slink aside again, and he saw three more men pass, also painted and chattering with uncouth noises as they went.

"Gosh, it's an army!" he muttered.

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"Must be a big *barrio* somewhere up the trail."

He crouched in the grass and put questions to himself. What did all this warpaint and expeditioning mean? Whom were the little painted devils of the hills preparing to attack? Not himself, quite evidently. His Dyaks? Pshaw, they would have gained the river and fashioned themselves a canoe long ago. What tribal warfare, then, was on hand? Obviously it would be to his advantage and safety to find out these things. But how?

Suddenly with swift decision his mind was made up to the boldest course as the most direct.

"Nothing like headquarters for information," he muttered.

Under cover of darkness he would stalk this *barrio*, this village which must be somewhere near on the mountain-side, and there by cautious spying he might be able to learn something about numbers and preparations.

Having arrived at a decision, he proceeded with methodical directness to retire further into the sheltering tangle and rest up in preparation for whatever might befall. It was characteristic of him that he was able to sleep. With the first rising of the brilliant, arc-light moon he was out on the path again, climbing up the steep slope with easy confidence. Muruts, he knew, would not venture into the jungle at night except in large bodies for fear of the devils, and a large body he would easily hear coming. After an hour of silent walking he suddenly stopped and sniffed. A whiff of charnel-house odor came to him down the breeze.

"That's them!" he exclaimed. "That's their filthy sty all right!"

And he proceeded with more caution, leaving the path and worming his way through the underbrush. In a few minutes he came to a festering fringe of decomposing bones and vegetable matter, the garbage-dump of the community. Beyond it was the clearing.

It was a ten-family *barrio;* that is to say, there were ten long barrack-like buildings built of split bamboo and raised on stilts, and each was divided into little cubicles for the use of the separate families which comprised its community group. In the white moonlight Dickinson could see before each cubicle in the veranda which ran the whole length of every barrack two or three round objects stuck on bamboo poles. Some cubicles had as many as a dozen. Dickinson knew them to be heads.

"Hm, big fighting village," he said to himself; and then his eyes turned to the *dobo* hut which was the center of the half-moon of barracks.

An impressive ceremony was going on. There was dead silence. No beating of drums and no chattering of women and children. Only men. About thirty of them squatted like watching vultures before an incredibly old man whose skin hung in myriad wrinkles from him like the slough of a snake.

With palsied deliberation the decrepit old wizard drew from the little fire which smoldered before him a bamboo pole the point of which had been hardening in the embers. With slow ceremony he painted it with an intricate design in vermilion and black, and as he thrust it into the earth before him and glared suddenly out at the crouching warriors, they beat their foreheads on the ground and barked a chorus of—

"A-hoo-ah!"

Then the ancient wickedness drew forth another pole and repeated the grim ceremony. The two last poles received special attention. In addition to the vermilion and black design the old devil-doctor painted them with circles of white and thrust them into the ground with a wheezing squeal of triumph at which the men's bark rose to a chanting shout.

For a long time Dickinson watched in creepy fascination. He knew the signs and he interpreted them to himself as the ceremony proceeded.

"War party getting magicked for a raid—those others must have been scouts. Taking it easy too, evidently feel that they've got their victims safe. *Hm*, lemme see, that's thirteen, fourteen heads they expect to get, two of 'em big chiefs. Wonder what tribe they intend to——"

Suddenly he stopped with a gasp as a suspicion of the real significance of those specialized poles shot into his mind. For an instant he held it, and then without waiting for more he backed frantically away from the clearing and commenced a crouching run through the underbrush. A minute later he was racing down the path.

"White men!" he kept repeating to himself as he ran. "Two white chiefs! That's

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what they're for! Wonder who in blazes was fool enough to come into this country. Wonder if they know they're marked. Gosh, I got to put them wise! Wonder how far they are." And with the last reflection he slowed down to the long shuffling trot of the jungle-man, prepared to keep it up for half the night.

DID they know they were marked? Very surely and terrifiedly they did. Only a few miles below the site of Dickinson's last camp huddled a disorderly encampment with tents and a mess of unnecessary cumbersome gear scattered about. The ground was rather rockier and more open than usual and a rough attempt had been made to render the place safer from sudden attack by thinning out the underbrush from between the bamboo clumps for a distance of fifty yards or so all 'round.

In the center of this patch crouched a dozen men in the last extremity of terror. They kept casting fearsome glances into the surrounding jungle which was just becoming latticed with long slants of vivid green and yellow by the rising sun's rays. In the very center of the huddled group were two men dressed in white man's clothes who pointed rifles in a wavering circle at all points of the compass from behind the bulwark of their abject followers' bodies.

A little way off lay two Dyaks, twisted into horrible contortions, each with a tiny sliver of bamboo sticking out of his body. No attempt had been made to move them. The party was hopelessly demoralized; the fear of lurking death which stabbed out of the clammy dark had taken them in its grip.

Into this picture of abject desolation suddenly stalked Dickinson from behind a bamboo clump. Helmet stuck jauntily over one eye, one hand in his breeches pocket, rifle slung loosely over the other, khaki shirt carelessly open at the throat, he looked as cool as though he had stepped out for a pleasant morning's shoot. But his smile was very thin.

"Hello, Speckbrock, 'lo, Iacopoulos," he greeted in the pleasantest of tones, and he stood tall and gaunt in the sunlight looking at them through half-shut eyes and nodding his head in slow scornful inspection.

The two bedraggled figures rose to greet him as a deliverer from heaven; but he shot a long finger accusingly at them and they sank down again.

"What I'm especially interested in just now," he drawled easily, "is which of you fellows was slick enough to swipe my compass."

Iacopoulos half-rose to protest; but Dickinson was looking right at the instrument. It lay by an overturned camp-table winking at him in the sun. He strode lankily to it and picked it up.

"Guess I know more about how to use this than you fellows anyway. Now see if you can tell me a little truth for a change or I'll take the two of you all apart and see what makes you tick. What did you Surinam toads come up after me for?"

The men dropped their eyes and shuffled uneasily on their feet.

"Come on now!" Dickinson's eyes suddenly blazed and he shouted so unexpectedly that both of them jumped.

"Well, er—we—well you see, Mynheer Dickinson, we thought that since you had turned down our so lucrative offer you must have found something particularly good, and so—I will tell you frankly—we came along to get in on it."

Dickinson's voice was conversationally pleasant.

"*Mm-m*, you did? You're lying by habit and heredity, Iacco. Suppose you wanted to get in on my whole outfit too—what d'you want to scare my men for? Shut up! You'll only lie again. Well, you see where it's got you, don't you? I suppose you know something about it already, but I can give you the harrowing details. You're picketed all 'round—guess there's some fifteen or twenty of 'em, judging by the size of the *barrio*, an' there's thirty more coming along presently to take home your heads. Got the stakes painted up and all."

Iacopoulos went gray under his dusky skin and babbled tremblingly of amendment intermingled with moaning appeals for help, though what help a lone white man could give in such a situation he was unable to imagine. Dickinson heard him with a sour face.

"*Hm!* So you think I can help, eh? We-ell, I'm not saying what I think 'cause I hate to hurt anybody's feelings; but I'm not scornful of anything that creeps or crawls or stinks, an' since you two yellow-bellies are the same color as my tan boots

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I'm going to snake you out of this, an' I hope God'll forgive me."

Iacopoulos almost embraced his knees, and chattered fulsome compliments at him. But the other man remained sullenly silent throughout the whole affair. Dickinson turned to him with sudden interest, and looked at him critically with his head on one side.

"Somehow," he said slowly, "I've an idea that you're the greafer scoundrel of the two; but you've got six times the bowels of friend Iacco. So I'll only kick you once." And he did. "Iacco gets two—so, and s-sso! Now then, jump to it, you dogs! Get this mess together! *Heh Mias orang*, monkey people, hump yourselves! We got one day to make the river. It'll kill you, but it's down-hill, and by cripes, you'll do it."

Dickinson knew that in a swift bold move lay their only chance. In that and in speed. He knew that the Muruts were deadly afraid of the white men's guns and that they would never dare to attack so strong a party openly by daylight; but he felt in no mood to impart this cheering information to these two who had set out so palpably to ruin his own little expedition. The hot indignation rose in him as he thought about it, and again he wondered what might have been their real motive.

A final inspiration of retribution came to him and he made them pick up the packs of the two Dyaks who had been killed. It was unthinkable ignominy for white men, but they were both thoroughly cowed by his truculent, heavy-handed efficiency and they obeyed.

With the advent of a leader who was master the demoralized Dyaks had begun to pick up some of their usual courage. Dickinson chose three of the most likely looking and skirmished ahead with them. The chief danger to be guarded against was of some swift-footed hillman working his way ahead and lying in ambush with his deadly blow-gun; to the rear, those who followed could be easily heard crashing through the jungle.

Under his strenuous driving, then—or rather, leading, which was just as effective, for nobody was anxious to be left behind—the party made astonishing progress. So much so that the skulking hillmen lost all hope of keeping them surrounded: it was all they could do to follow, and at a respectful distance too, for the two white men, frightened as they were, were not too frightened to shoot, and every now and then the yell of some over-bold warrior showed that one of them, at least, could shoot straight.

Yet the danger which Dickinson had foreseen met them at last. They were out of the cane and bamboo now and were twisting their way through a rotting runway of tangled *rukh*, when one of the skirmishing Dyaks shouted a quick warning. Dickinson saw from the corner of his eye a thin yellow flicker shooting toward him. He ducked with the speed of a snake, and a sharp *pfut* against his helmet told him how close had been the call.

Without giving the man a chance to reload his tube he leaped for the knotted mass of elephant-creeper from which the dart had come, and by the time the others had come up he was tying the hands of a slim little brown man with his own *jawat* cloth. He was quite a boy, with fierce black eyes and lithe shoulders and splendidly developed legs. Dickinson looked him over critically and grunted with satisfaction.

"*Hm!* Guess you're the only one who had the speed to work around and get ahead of us. Fine!"

"What are you going to do with him?" panted Iacopoulos. "Kill him?"

Dickinson growled testily at him.

"No, fool! Going to take him along. Got some business with him. Come ahead there. We got to make the river before dark."

And once again he set to crashing and squelching and floundering through the oozy slush.

After that the hillmen seemed to lose heart. To head off their hoped-for victims was impossible, and to follow was of no profit as well as being dangerous. Many of them had fallen by the way, for the man Speckbrock, like the Dyaks, under Dickinson's determined leadership had taken hold of his shattered nerves and shot with a vindictive sullenness and an accuracy which was discouraging. Only a few of the boldest followed far behind, and even they presently dropped off as they neared the river, for there were Dyak villages along the banks, and the Dyaks had no love for the wild men.

The sight of the clean, swift stream came to the straining party like the sea to Xenophon's fleeing ten thousand. It was the Dyaks' own element. They threw

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themselves on their faces and prayed aloud to their various water gods. But Dickinson gave them no time to delay.

"Where d'you hide your canoe?" he snapped at the white men. "Ah, I see it! Call that hiding, you poor babes in the wood? And—you—had—the—all-fired—gall to try and follow me! Well I'm—aw shucks! Pile in there. Hop to it now, you toads! So! Push her off!"

Iacopoulos and Speckbrock, in the midst of their relief from the haunting terror of the jungle which had broken them all up, suddenly looked at one another in dismay. The former lost his speech altogether. It was Speckbrock who addressed Dickinson for the first time. Mingled with his furtive disappointment was an incredible amazement at this man who had bullied them out of the very throat of death.

"But you! *Gott* in heaffen, don't you come with?"

Dickinson grinned at them with cheerful malice.

"No sir-ree! Though I've an idea somehow that you'd like me to. I was kinder fancying you'd ha' learned not to butt into my business by now. What concerns you is what you're going to do, an' I'll tell you. You're going straight down this river as fast as the stream and twelve Dyaks can take you. And listen—if I see you here again I'll take home your skins as a souvenir. Now slide! *Muy pronto!* Me, I've got some business with this head-collector."

He squatted gauntly on the bank with his rifle across his knees and watched the canoe shoot down the stream, and he laughed at the black rage of the thwarted white men.

Then the mirth died on his lips and his face relaxed at last into lines of infinite weariness and he turned with set determination to his business with his young captive. His business consisted in showing him certain samples of an earthy-reddish granular substance and pointing up-stream while he pressed a hunting-knife suggestively against his neck.

TEN days later Dickinson was in Bulungan again, jaunty, spruce, and inscrutably cheerful as ever. Carefully dressed in the conventional town-clothes of tussor silk, he went to the office of Mr. Hazleton. Mr. Hazleton, he was informed, had gone up the coast to Tidung and had left a message that he should follow him there.

Good. When was the next coastwise steamboat sailing?

That very night, or rather, early morning at 4 A.M., going out with the tide, and the clerk would arrange for a *sampan* boatman to wait for him at the wharf at three o'clock to row him out.

Dickinson thanked him and withdrew. At three o'clock he made his way to the wharf preceded by a Malay boy who carried his very civilized leather bag and a lantern—for the streets of Bulungan waste no oil at 3 A.M. A *sampan* was duly waiting. Dickinson leisurely took his place in its stern and the man rowed away into the mist. At last Dickinson relaxed himself with a sigh and congratulated himself on a good work well done.

Presently a dim shape loomed out of the darkness ahead. Dickinson bestirred himself.

"*Dampfboot Brouwers Hoek?*" he called.

A confirmatory grunt came from the lookout forward, and the sampan swirled against the side and began to slip past with the tide. Dickinson flung his bag up and sprang for the low rail. He was already scrambling aboard before he realized how unexpectedly low it was. Before he could recover, he felt himself clutched at by half a dozen pairs of hands. Something dark and heavy was flung over his head. He felt himself being rushed forward, while his brain reeled from an overpowering sweetish odor; then he dropped a short distance; something slammed miles above him and he floated away into black nothingness.

He fluttered back to consciousness with the feeling of the sea's motion and with the light streaming on to his face through a little open hatchway. Immediately his mind was alert; but he lay still for a long time reviewing events and watchfully suspicious of that open invitation above. He looked 'round for a possible weapon. There was nothing; he lay on ropes, coils of ropes and tangles of ropes; there was nothing else.

Decision came to him with his usual suddenness. He jumped to his feet and stuck his head and shoulders out of the hatch. He found himself on a little schooner which was heeling over on a long tack away from the land. Two men sat on a skylight amidships, evidently waiting

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for him. Immediately the taller of them leered with evil glee.

"A verree good morning to you, Mynheer Dickinson. And how are you this fine morning?"

The other man sat scowlingly silent.

Dickinson's smile was full of good fellowship.

"Oh, hello, Yellow-bellies, good morning," he greeted. He looked casually 'round. "I see we're sailing south. Too bad; my way lies north."

The man Speckbrock emitted a surly growl. At last on this ship he seemed to have taken command of the situation; at last satisfaction for all past indignities was his. He came forward a half-step and growled at Dickinson.

"For vunce in your life, then, Mr. Dickinson, you don't go your vay; you come mine. I vill tell you; ve go south to Samarinda, vhere a certain chentleman vill speak vith you."

Dickinson yawned with ennui.

"So? Glad to meet him, 'm sure. What's the trip for?"

Iacopoulos of the ever-ready tongue had to come into this. He, too, had many gratuitous insults to repay.

"What for? Aha, my verree clever friend. What did you go into the hills for? You think we did not know. 'Fool' you called me the last word you spoke. Who found it out, do you think? Tell him, Speckbrock, who found out for you. Tell him who made for you the plan to keep from Mr. Hazleton this information which he wants so badly. My verree clever friend, how will you like to make a long stay with our good friend Captain Van Zyl here?"

Dickinson thankfully let him rave on; he was thinking furiously. Presently he withdrew his disinterested gaze from the sea, and with never a flicker of expression on his face played for information.

"Why, you two cents' worth o' dog meat," he drawled lazily, "are you making all this fuss about those samples of cinnabar I've got in my bag?"

Speckbrock's sullen eyes suddenly gleamed.

"Quit your fool wrangling, Iacopoulos, and go fetch the bag from the cabin," he ordered.

It was what Dickinson wanted to know. In his bag was a long blue Luger automatic, a pistol which he had made famous from the Banjar up to Sarawak. With one tremendous bound he heaved his lean length out of the hatch and rushed across the deck. A fist like a bag of ore samples took Speckbrock over the jugular vein and sprawled him over the skylight, numb all down one side of his body.

The same bony weapon swung like a derrick-arm into the small of Iacopoulos' back as he ducked 'round the companion-hatch and shot him in an agonized heap into the floor of the cabin. With another panther bound Dickinson was after him, and in another second he was out on the deck again, caressing his gun as one might love a child and smiling engagingly at Captain Van Zyl who held the wheel.

"Guess you'll turn her around now, Cap, eh? My way lies north, as I said. D'you mind if I frisk you? So. Now holler your Malay crew to heave her over while I search these rats."

The writhing Iacopoulos apparently carried no weapon; but from Speckbrock's pocket Dickinson drew a long-barrelled Mauser. He nodded at him with shrewd understanding and murmured slowly:

"Hm! Always did think you were the more dangerous of the two. Trouble with you is, my friend, you forgot that this information was going to Uncle Sam—and you can't buck Uncle, you know."

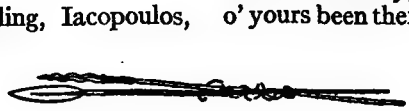
Two hours later Captain Van Zyl called sulkily to Dickinson:

"There's Tidung on the port bow. Shall I put her in?"

"No," ordered Dickinson shortly. "Head on for Tawao. You'll have the pleasure of bringing me back to Tidung—alone."

Speckbrock started, while Iacopoulos jumped to his feet with a sudden wild suspicion in his eyes. Dickinson noted it and grinned at them in the most friendly manner.

"Yep, you've guessed it, fellers. Talking about a long stay, you know. Tawao is British territory, and there's a few friends o' yours been there quite a while—interned."



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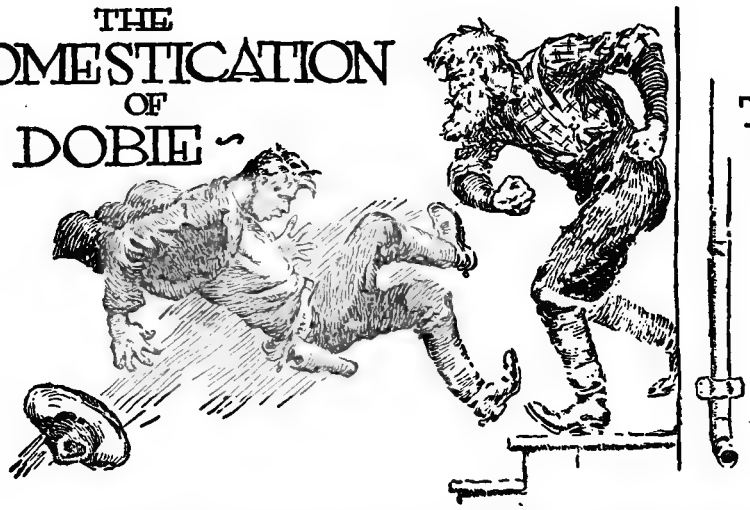
THE DOMESTICATION OF DOBIE

BY W·C TUTTLE



Author of "Making Good for Muley," "Tied up for Tombstone," etc.

Mesquite City, June 10.

DEAR HANK:

I ain't much of a hand to express myself on paper, but I promised to drop you a line, so when you receive this you will know that I am still keeping my word.

Me and Emmeline are O. K. and I hope these few lines will find you the same also. Hank, I want to ask you a question if you know who it was that threw that boot at me and Emmeline when we was getting on the train that night?

I ain't so mad now as I was then, 'cause I'm mostly all heeled up but I'd like to know who throwed that boot, 'cause there was a spur on it. I got spurred along the ear and bled like a stuck hog. I know it's the custom to throw old shoes, etc., at a wedding but no man is a gentleman and a skolar what won't take his spurs off first. Suppose it had hit Em instead of me?

I think it was "Windy" Wilson, and I think it so hard that I don't mind telling you confidential that he's a hoarse-stealing coyote. He ain't got no principle, Hank, and if he ever washed his feet his own dog couldn't trail him.

I know you won't tell him I said so, Hank, but if it happens to leak out I'll back you up for every word. Me and Emmeline get along fine so far. But I don't mind telling you that no man ought to marry any girl before he knows more about her. Me and Em didn't know each other only a few months, and I'm sorry we didn't find out some things, Hank. I ain't knocking Emmeline, you understand. She's a good girl with no bad habits, but me and her relatives ain't exactly sleeping under the same blanket.

You know, Hank, that I had a good job there on the Lazy Y, but Em didn't want to live around there and she told me that if I would leave there she'd see that I got a good job from her uncle. I ain't no jibber, Hank, as you know, and my motter is to live and let live and right don't wrong no man, but when I finds out that her uncle owns a lot of sheep I talks right out loud in church.

I didn't say nothing against a sheep, 'cause a sheep ain't no more to blame for being a sheep than Windy is to blame for not having any brains, but it makes me mad to think that he offers me forty a month to herd same.

Her uncle's name is Gabriel Galesburg, and he's built like a hay-rack. Honest his whiskers are almost a pink color, Hank, and he seems to think more of them than he does of his wife. I asked him if he didn't get them from sleeping out in the rain with a red blanket wrapped around his face, and he changed the subject by saying—

"It often strikes me that the world is full of chances to be funny without being personal."

He never did tell me if I was right, Hank. There is folks you can't never pin right down to a answer. Me and Em are

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living with them but I don't know for how long. Uncle asked me the other day if we expected to make our home with them or just be boarders and roomers at their house, but I ain't answered him yet. We only been here three weeks, and I ain't done much since I got married.

I met Bob Pelkey here the other day. You remember Bob, don't you? He used to rustle cows up around the border, and afterward he sort of got religion and quit his erring ways. He's dealing a stud poker game here in Mesquite and wearing diamonds. Me and him proceeds to talk over old times. We drapes over the Palace bar long enough to toast both sides of the country to a nice brown color.

I tells him about Emmeline and he wants to meet her so bad that I takes him up to supper with me. Emmeline got sore like a fool and gets me out alone on the porch.

"Ain't you got no sense?" she says to me. "This ain't your house and what right you got bringing drunk tin-horns up here to supper to insult me and Aunt Phoebe? That critter is asleep in there on the sofy."

"I'm going in and congratulate him," says I. "Anybody what can get drunk enough to sleep on that infernal sofy has my utmost respect. It ain't nothing but a lot of busted springs and hay, and anybody what can ride it without a bucking-strap ought to have a job with Buffalo Bill's circus. And what is more if he's drunk enough to try and sleep there he's too drunk to insult anybody."

You know how I can talk back to anybody, Hank.

"You go right in there and throw him out," says she.

Now ain't that just like a woman, Hank? Drink up a man's money, take him home to supper and then have your wife want him throwed out 'cause he goes to sleep on the sofy. Why, I wouldn't do that to Windy, and what I wouldn't do to Windy would be awful to think about. I promised to obey Emmeline when the preacher asked me to, Hank, but there wasn't nothing said about me acting as household bouncer. She keeps on getting so mad that I feels sorry for her, Hank.

"You wimmen folks keep away," says I, "and I'll do the throwing."

Her and her aunt shuts themselves up in the kitchen, and I went in where Bob is snoring on the sofy, and sets down beside him. He's got a bottle in his coat pocket, and I was afraid it would get busted when I throwed him out, so I drank part of it and cached the rest behind the clock.

I don't think yet that I throwed him out, but I can't seem to remember much about it. I remember hearing somebody say something about hogs, and then somebody throwed me outdoors and I skinned my face on a rock. It made me so darned mad that I crawled out from under Bob and went down-town. That was the first time I ever got throwed out of my own house and it makes me awful sore, Hank. Of course some will argue that it wasn't my house, but I considered it as such.

A little later I meets uncle down-town and he stops me.

"Young feller," says he, "you better keep away from that house until you can act decent. You can't sponge on me and disgrace my fambly any more. I don't mind feeding the appetite of a horse, but when said horse brings that ass of a Pelkey along to be fed, too, I won't stand for it. Also if you get drunk again Emmeline is through with you."

Then I says to him, Hank, and I was sore:

"Mister Galesburg, there's two sides to the argument. I suppose my wife told you about it, and a woman always exaggerates things. I suppose she told you that me and Bob was drunk, didn't she? I think so. Just because Bob was all tired out and went to sleep on the sofy she took it for granted that he was drunk as a boiled owl. He wasn't no more drunk than I was. Sabe?"

"Well," says he, "maybe you're right, but I don't think so, 'cause he laid there for twenty minutes after you left for down-town. I throwed you both out, so I ought to know."

That's the kind of a uncle she's got, Hank. Can you blame me when I say that a feller ought to know more about a girl's folks before he takes her for keeps? You know me, Hank, and you know I'm a pretty decent sort of a person. There ain't nothing vishous about me and I'm full of the milk of human kindness but there are some things that I can't stand for.

I had thirty-two dollars left but Emmeline has got that, and I owe Sam Fletcher two dollars for bed right now. I don't know what I'll decide to do for a living, Hank. Bob says he can get me a shift on the Faro layout here if I can put up a cash

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bond of a thousand dollars, but if I had a thousand dollars I'd hire a good lawyer and then take a shot at Uncle Gabriel for offering me forty a month to herd sheep, and I might have enough to plead not guilty if I happens to meet Windy face to face.

I ain't asking for no loan, Hank, but if you can put yourself in my place you'll see how I'm hooked up. I'm so mad at Emmeline and her fambly that I won't ask them for a thing. Hoping these few lines will find you flush and good-hearted I beg to remane, very truly y'rs,

DOBIE DALTON,
care of Palace Hotel.

Mesquite City, June 18

DEAR HANK:

Didn't you get my letter? If not I can say that I ain't no better off than I was before I wrote you. I'm glad I didn't write to Windy or "Hondo" Huddleson, 'cause I know they wouldn't loan me two-bits if I was to give them a handful of twenty-dollar gold pieces for security.

Honest, Hank, if air cost half a cent for a billion cubik miles them two fellers would smother to death inside of twenty seconds. I hates to think that I know anybody what is so tight.

I ain't living at home yet, Hank, but I expect to soon. If a man's place ain't at his wife's side where is it? A feller what herds sheep for Uncle Gabe is staying up at the house now and he's a simp, Hank. His name is "Stony" Wells. I seen him and Emmeline, my wife, down at the store and he bought her some candy hearts. Any man is a simp what will buy candy hearts for a married woman, ain't he, Hank?

It made me sore, Hank, for her to act like her husband didn't have enough money and principal to buy candy for her, so I goes up to the house to chide her about it. Uncle Gabe comes to the door and sort of looks me over. Hank, that feller has got a eye like a mean bronc what ain't been showed the error of his ways. While I ain't saying a word against Emmeline, you understand, I wish I had knowed more about her folks before the marriage.

"Can I do something for you?" he asks, like I was carrying a bunch of stuff to sell him at so much down and the rest in a minute.

"I come to see my wife, Mister Galesburg," says I. "You don't need to call her 'cause I'm coming inside."

"Somebody must have give you the wrong steer, if you think so," says he. "Did somebody tell you that you could bust into my house without a invite?"

Ain't he a queer pelican, Hank? Just as though I has to ask somebody for a invitation to see my wife.

"Well," says I, "I don't know how you feel about it, but I wasn't raised a pet, and I does some things no matter what the consequences. I'm free, white and twenty-one, and I'd admire to see you step to one side."

He did, Hank. Emmeline has got sort of a loving disposition, and Aunt Phoebe ain't no danged Nero, but when there's so much sweetness in a fambly there has to be a little gall to balance things. Uncle Gabe steps to one side, as I orders him to, Hank, and when I starts to go past him he hits me so hard that I goes out near the front gate and stands on my head in a currant bush.

When I got up he's standing there filling his pipe, and when he sees me go to my hip he grins like a over-grown pup. Honest, when he grins I think of a Airedale dog.

"You might imitate Aladdin," says he. "Rub your shining lamp and wish for a gun. Badman from Bitter Crick soaked his gun for hooch, eh?"

I'm just about to give him the laugh, 'cause I didn't soak my gun for booze at all, Hank, I let Sam Fletcher have it for room rent, when here comes Emmeline and Aunt Phoebe around the corner of the house.

"Dobie Dalton, you been fighting again!" says Emmeline, sort of mad-like, and I has to laugh, even if I am mad, 'cause the joke's on her this time.

"Dear Emmeline," says I, "you're all wrong, 'cause I didn't do a bit of it. I came up here to take you away with me, and that dog-faced relative of yours by marriage hit me without warning. I don't want my sweet little wife to live in the same atmosphere with a sheep-herding cross between Jessie James and a timber-wolf."

"Just where do you intend to take her?" asks Uncle Gabe, just as though it was any of his business and believe me, Hank, I told him where to head in at.

"Go get your hat on, Emmeline," says I, "I'm going to take you with me like a married man ought to."

"Go ahead with him, Em," says he.

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"The walk will do you good, and we'll have supper ready at five." Then he turned to me: "Where you going to put her—in a public corral? You ain't got the price of a room."

"Yes," says Emmeline, "I would like to know where you are going to take me, Dobie."

"Wife," says I, just like that, Hank, "wife, I'm going to take you with me down to the post-office and maybe over to the depot, and then I'll take you to the best hotel in the city."

You see, Hank, I figured that as soon as you got my letter you would either send me a letter with some money in it or maybe telegraft some to me. You know I didn't come right out and ask you for money, Hank, but I tried to hint strong enough for you to understand. I figured on it strong, but I must have figured wrong. Emmeline went over to the post-office with me and then over to the depot, but there wasn't a thing, Hank. If you sent me anything it's lost.

"Now," says Emmeline, "let's go up to the hotel, Dobie, I'm all tired out."

Now, Hank, you see how trusting a friend can put you up against it. I makes a bluff and gets called, and I ain't even got a face card to lay down on the table.

"Emmeline, my dear," says I, "have you got any of that thirty-two dollars left?"

"I never had it, Dobie," says she. "Didn't you spend it?"

Dear Hank, this is the last sheet of paper I got, so I'll have to tell you the rest later. Don't let that thirty-two dollars scare you from sending me a little if you got it, 'cause I ain't got that thirty-two dollars. Six-bits would look like a pirut's hoard to me right now. If Windy or Hondo asks about me, Hank, you tell them I'm lousy with coin and doing well. If I have to sleep much longer at Sam Fletcher's I'll be lousy but not with wealth. Do you know what I'd do if I knowed you was facing starvation or sheep-herding, Hank? I am waiting to hear from you anxiously. Y'rs very truly,

DOBIE DALTON, care of gen. del.

Mesquite City, June 25

DEAR HANK:

I reckon I can find time to write you a few lines to let you know how I am getting along, as I am not doing much running around and have lots of loose time. Hank, are you sore at me? Sometimes I think I ain't got no dependable friends left a-tall. I don't claim that Windy or Hondo are friends of mine, but at that I don't think they'd leave a feller in the lurch.

Remember in my last letter where I asks Emmeline where that thirty-two dollars is, Hank? And then she says just like this—

"Didn't you spend it, Dobie?"

Well, sir, it hits me all of a sudden like a ton of bricks, and I remembers where that money is, Hank. It's up at Uncle Gabriel's house, hanging on the wall in my vest. I changed vests when I came here, 'cause I didn't want to wear my Sunday suit all the time. I takes Em up to the hotel, and I asks her to set down in the parlor, while I asks the prop. for a sweet of rooms. Then I ducks out the back door and lopes off up to uncle's place. I hammers on the door and Uncle Gabe opens up. He squints at me for quite a while, like I was somebody he can't quite place, and then he sort of grins and says:

"Oh! I didn't know you at first. You've changed a lot except in one eye. Did you come up to have them both made alike?"

"Peace be with you," says I.

Hank, you know me and you know I ain't no brawler nor hoodlum. I never can understand why a man as big as Uncle Gabe wants to range sheep.

"I came for a vest," says I.

"The nights are getting a little cold for this time of year," says he. "I'm about half out of vests, but I can let you have a saddle-blanket if you promise not to sell it for rum."

"I ain't asking for no darned charity," says I. "I bought and paid for that vest, and just 'cause it happens to be hanging in your bungaloo ain't no sign she's your property. It ain't the vest's fault 'cause I'll bet if it could walk it wouldn't wait for me to come up here after it."

"What kind of a looking garment was it?" he asks.

"Well," says I, "I expected to have to describe it, 'cause good clothes are strange to a sheep-herder. It's red and yellow checks, got buttons down the front on one side, four pockets and a place for each arm."

"Oh!" says he, "So that's what it was. I heard a lot of noise in that room, but I thought it was a flock of pack-rats. It will be a pleasure to get it out of the house. I'll chase it out to you."

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He shuts the door in my face, Hank. Pretty soon he comes back, with a sad look on his face, and shakes his head:

"I'm sorry," says he. "Sorry for Stony Wells. He left here this morning, and Aunt Phoebe says he took a fancy to that garment. She thought it was an old one and she gave it to him. He'll stampede all my sheep."

"Somebody owes me thirty-two dollars," says I, after a while.

"That's nice," says he. "You won't miss one vest so much then," and he shuts the door in my face, Hank.

What could I do, Hank? Thirty-two dollars all shot to thunder. I sure wanted to bust that door open and clean out that fambly, but under the circumstances how could I? Even if he is a villian, Hank, he is still my wife's relative by marriage, and I hates scenes, arguments and brawls.

When I has to fight, Hank, I'm a true sportsman, and I don't want to lower myself to the level of fighting with shepherds. You know me, old-timer, and you know that my motter is let well enough alone. I'd rather starve than to do anybody a injury, so I tries to saunter away like the loss of that vest didn't mean nothing to me, and I ain't sauntered far when I meets Emmeline.

"Does the owner of the hotel live up here?" she asks, sarcastic-like.

"Or did you forget where you left me?"

"Wife," says I, "wife, please pardon me, but I was coming right back."

"Yes, and left me there to be insulted!" she snaps. "Mister Fletcher came in the room just after you left, and I asked him if Mister Dalton had got a sweet of rooms here yet. He didn't know me, and he said: 'Madam, I hope not. If Dobie Dalton ever gets a sweet of rooms here he's got Raffles beat sixteen ways from the jack.' He said that if you ever got hold of a two-bit piece you'd think it was so big that you'd hire a dray to haul it around in."

What's the use of arguing with a woman, Hank? Take the advice of a married man and don't never do it. I said to her:

"Honey, it's too late now to listen to things against your husband. If you live a while longer you'll find lots of scandalmongers who will try and knock your husband, but the best thing to do is to turn a deef ear to their voices. You go on up to Uncle Gabe's and stay inside out of the noise, 'cause your legitimate protector is going right down-town and make somebody eat their words."

"Don't you never think of nothing but fight?" she asks. "If you'd use some of your energy in work we'd be better off. Either do that or join the army."

"Well, Emmeline," says I, "if that's the way you feel about it I won't go down and beat their heads off. I was just going to do it on your acc't, but if you don't wish me to I won't."

I didn't, Hank. A promise is a promise with me, and when I tell you I ain't going to lick nobody you can bank on my word. Remember that gold watch I won at Pendleton, when I rode Outlaw? It's been bucked out of my pocket so often that it don't keep no more time than a rabbit, but just the same I'm sleeping on it, Hank. Sam Fletcher gave me three nights' room rent free for it, and I still got one night coming. Don't know when I'll collect, but it's nice to have something coming to you. I felt the same about your letters, Hank, but I never got any.

Now I'm going to tell you a secret, Hank. Don't tell Hondo or Windy, and when you get in the same fix I'll keep my mouth shut. I never told my right name, but I reckon they'll find it out, 'cause they say there's a detective on the case.

That day after Emmeline, my wife, goes back to Uncle Gabriel's I goes down to the Palace saloon. I ain't got a cent, Hank, but once in a while a feller comes along what don't like to drink alone. Two of them came this time. They're punchers from over in the Blue Joint country. One is named "Blazer" and the other "Sleepy."

I has quite a few drinks with them and then they sets up the supper to me. I told them how I'm fixed, Hank. I told them about the suffering I been undergoing, and they're sympathetic you bet. We're up in their room when I tells them about it, and one of them shed tears.

"If my folks treated me thataway I'd get desperate," states Blazer. "I wouldn't care how I got money just so I got it."

"You're darn right," agrees Sleepy. "I'd show up that bunch if I had to rob a bank to get the money."

"I ain't got no gun," I reminds them. "You can't do no bank robbery if you ain't got no gun."

Well, Hank, what do you think? Blazer

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hauls out a gun and hands it to me—

"Here," says he, "I got another one."

I sure took it, Hank. She's a .45, single-action Colt, and hangs just like my old one. We sets there on the bed and has a few more drinks out of a bottle.

"Good banks are scarce," states Sleepy, "mostly always they ain't worth your time, but when you does hit a good one you're fixed to be lazy quite a while. What kind of a bank they got here?"

I tells them that I don't know, but in a thriving community there ought to be some money. Blazer peeks out in the hall to see if anybody is listening, and then he says to me:

"Dobie," just like he knowed me as long as you have, Hank, "Dobie, let us solve your problem. We're friends in need. Sabe? We'll keep under cover and let you do the scout work. Tomorrow you go into the bank, sort of casual-like, and look it over for us. See how she frames for doors, windows, safes and so forth. A man of your perceptions and standing in the community ought to be able to stroll in there and see it all at a glance. If you wasn't an intelligent looking person, and packing a lot of brains I'd never let you do it, but you got a lot of sabe, old-timer, and you seems to know human nature to the core. How does she suit you?"

"Money is the prime objection to me right now," says I, "I ain't got no place to sleep and nothing to eat upon."

Hank, them fellers were perfect gentlemen. They immediate and soon hands me a five-spot, and don't even want a mortgage on my life in security. I wish that Windy and Hondo could see how them fellers acted, 'cause it would be a lesson to them in generosity.

The next day I wanders into the bank, and I plays my part so well that I even talks with the man what handles the money. I looks that place over fine, and when I tells Sleepy and Blazer what I seen they are tickled stiff.

"Tomorrow night," states Sleepy. "From now on until then you keep away from us, Dobie, so nobody can say that you was in with us if we get caught. We'll all meet here tomorrow night at 9 o'clock, and then inside half an hour you can buy some sheep of your own. Sabe?"

I has to laugh after I left them, Hank, 'cause the jokes on them if they think I'm going to buy sheep. Of course I knowed he was joking but if he wasn't, Hank, I'd make him hard to catch.

I seen them in the High Light saloon that night, playing pool, but they don't act like they ever seen me before, which was the proper wrinkle. I look at them like I don't know them from Adam's off ox, and they both nods, like I done the right thing. That night I oils up that old gun and prepares for tomorrow night.

But, Hank, I has a dream that night that sure changed things. I dreamed that I was wearing a striped suit, and was breaking rocks. And Uncle Gabriel is watching over me with a Winchester, and when I don't break them fast enough he prods me in the wishbone with the gun barrel. I wakes up in a cold sweat and my whole future is changed, while I lays there and thinks things over.

Suppose I get caught, Hank? What will become of Emmeline? Without no strong arm upon which to lean what's she going to do? If the law grabs away the protector what's to become of the women and children? You know me, Hank, and you know I always thinks of the right thing at the right time. Thinks I like this: if I sneak over to the bank early, Blazer and Sleepy won't see me, and I can tip the whole thing off to the banker. A thousand dollars or two rewards in the hand is worth a lot of money in a safe. Hank, I don't like no squealer. I ain't the kind what fattens on nobody's misery, but I figure that right don't wrong nobody.

The next morning early I sneaks out the back way and goes down to the bank. I walks right inside, and there ain't nobody there but the man what runs the place. He looks me over, chilly-like, and says—

"The bank ain't open for business yet."

"It is for my business," says I, grinning at him. "You can thank your luck that a honest man is facing you, and any other rewards you may mention will be accepted, for what I'm going to tell you. Tomorrow night me and two other fellers are going to rob this bank."

"Wait a minute," says he, and then he leads me into a separate room.

"Now," says he, "go ahead where you left off."

I told him all about our plans and specifications and he seems real interested. I tells him how slick I was in getting the plans

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of the place, and when I gets through he says to me:

"You set right here for a little while. I'm going to get another party what will be interested in your story."

Well, Hank, he's gone about the length of two cigarets, and then he comes back with the sheriff.

"You planned this robbery, did you?" asks the sheriff.

"You bet I did," says I.

"I'll just take you along with me," says he, taking me by the arm.

"You're too wise to be loose on an unsuspecting community."

"Wait a minute, Mister Man," says I, "you're too hasty. I'm the honest one of the bunch, and I don't go to jail. I'm turned honest. Sabe?"

"Yes," says he, "you may be honest, young feller, but you didn't turn honest soon enough. The bank was robbed last night."

Now, wouldn't that frost you, Hank? Them fellers must have got their days mixed, 'cause they sure picked the wrong night. They got three thousand dollars in paper money and about a thousand in gold.

Well, Hank, I don't know of any news to write, so will close. I ain't got much of anything to do, so I'll write you again maybe. Don't tell Windy or Hondo. Write to me in care of gen. del., sheriff's office, courthouse.

y'rs very truly
PATRICK ANTONIO SCHMIDT.

P. S. This is the name I gave.

Mesquite City, July 8

DEAR HANK:

Well, Hank, I am out of jail again, the same of which will likely please you. My trial was a farse, as it should have been, and I was vindicated of wrong-doing as I expected. Right will always come out on top.

Have you seen Windy or Hondo lately, Hank? I sure got the deadwood on them Jaspers. The lawyers sent up there for some character witnesses, and I'll be darned if they didn't get Windy and Hondo. Hank, for a minute I could feel the rope under my left ear, when them two walks into the jail to see the sheriff. He was out but I was in, so they comes over to my room.

"Ain't he the desperate thing, Hondo?" asks Windy, meaning me, and Windy says—

"I'd hate to meet him if I wasn't heeled."

So I says:

"What you two doing down here? Ain't you tempting Providence pretty strong, getting inside of a jail this way?"

"We was supeenied as witnesses to your character, Dobie," says Hondo.

"The law pays the freight all the way down here for us to answer whether we considers you a safe person to let loose."

Hank I feels as weak as sage tea for a minute, and I decides to talk as pleasant as possible to them, so I says—

"How is things around the home range now?"

"We don't know," says Windy, rolling a cigaret one-handed. "Me and Hondo just got in from a hunting trip over in Flathead country."

"Never killed a darn thing either," states Hondo. "No game."

"See anybody you know over there?" I asks, and they shakes their heads.

"Nope," says Windy, "never seen a darn soul, and we was gone three weeks."

"That's good," says I. "Now, you two lying, currycomb artists better not hand me any the worst of it in court or I'll swear that you was the two what robbed that bank. What about my character now?"

They thinks it over for a while, and then Windy cusses low-like:

"You sure are lily white and all wool, Dobie," states Windy. "Ain't he the upright person, Hondo?"

"Not here," I reminds them. "Tell it to the judge."

"Uh-huh," agrees Hondo. "We'll sure lie to beat ——, but as soon as you get loose, Dobie, what we said in court don't go."

Well, Hank, them fellers sure done what I told them to. The lawyer says to Windy—

"What do you know about the defendant's character?"

Windy says:

"If Dobie Dalton told me that he planned the robbery of that bank I'd know in a minute that he lied. He likely heard about it, tried to get in on the reward and also get a little notoriety. He's weak-minded but harmless."

The lawyer asks Hondo's opinion, and he answers like this:

"I've knowed Dobie a long time, and nobody can ever convince me that he's got the nerve to rob a magpie's nest. He likely got too much hooch aboard and dreamed

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this thing. He's only wicked in his mind."

You see, Hank, I has them fellers complete under my control, and they has to say things they don't want to. Nobody can say a word about my character, but with such liars as them it's best to have a cinch on their testimony.

All my fambly are in the court-room, and Uncle Gabe acts like he was enjoying it a lot. The judge got me up there and asks me a lot of questions. He asks me how it was that I suffers change of heart before the time for the robbery. I didn't dare to tell about that dream, on acc't of Uncle Gabe being back there, so I tells him that I got to thinking about my poor little wife. Uncle Gabe roars right out in court, like this:

"Haw! Haw! Haw!"

That makes the judge sore. He could see where it ain't nothing to laugh at, and so could I. Well, Hank, they decides that there ain't no evidence that I partook of the robbery, so they turns me loose.

Well, Hank, there ain't no news to write, so I'll close. It's hard to write propped up in bed like this, when all your knuckles are skinned, and you got two black eyes and some almost busted ribs and several teeth missing. I happens to meet Windy and Hondo after the trial. If I don't find that shepherd with my vest on I don't know how the doctor is ever going to get paid. Write a little oftener, Hank. Do you still get paid on the first. Y'rs respectfully,

DOBIE DALTON.
care of gen. del.

P. S. I asked the postmaster if I could cash a money-order from you if I got one, and he said I likely could.

Mesquite City, July 15

DEAR HANK:

There ain't no news to write, but as I ain't got nothing else to do I will drop you a few lines so you will know I am alive. Have you got cramps in your fingers or are you too lazy to write? I thought that Windy and Hondo was the stingiest folks I ever knowed but maybe I'm wrong at that Things are pretty fair with me, but I ain't bought out no railroads nor nothing yet.

When I was laid up, Hank, I soaked that six-shooter to Sam Fletcher for some more night's rest. He didn't want to take it on acc't of him having too many guns now, but so long as I ain't got nothing else he accepts same. That doctor orates that I owe him twenty-five dollars for treating me. Hank, you know me, and you know that I never have nor never will try to sneak out of a debt. My word is as good as gold, and folks what know me good don't ask nothing better than my promise, but when a strange doctor hounds you for a measly little am't like that it makes you mad. He comes up to my room, and he says to me like this, Hank—

"You owe me twenty-five dollars, and I want it."

Says I to him:

"There ain't nothing unreasonable about that. You wait down-stairs until I dress and I'll come down and pay you."

Hank, I couldn't buy a grave for a microbe, so I lets myself down out of the window, and tries to drop on to the roof of a shed. I hit the roof O. K. but it was one of them slanting roofs, and I skidded off and hit terry ferma.

When I opened my eyes, Hank, who do you think I seen? I was looking at Sleepy and Blazer. Honest, Hank, I was. They're setting there on a box, looking at me, and I says to myself—

"Dobie, you thought you lived on the second floor, but you must have been mistaken, 'cause just falling two stories wouldn't make you see things like these."

"You're a fine pal, you are," says Blazer, sad-like. "Where's our share?"

"Your share of what?" I asks.

"Of the money you got from the bank that night," says Sleepy. "You must have got in a hurry to get rich. You can't double-cross us, old-timer. Come across."

"Ain't it a sad state of affairs, Sleepy?" says Blazer. "Loan a man a gun to help you with a job, and never even get the gun back. You got to give him credit for being clever, though."

He was right, Hank. You sure got to hand it to me for that. Maybe I don't show a lot of brains in my face, but I sure got a lot of them under my hair. Them two fellers ain't common ordinary bluffers like Windy and Hondo, so I got to think fast.

"I suppose you think I got the money here in my pocket, and all I got to do is spit on my thumb and count out your share," says I, sarcastic-like.

"Now you've commenced to say something, Dobie," says Sleepy. "Where do

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you wish us to go, and how long will it take you to hand us one thousand, three hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three and a third cents per each?"

"You wouldn't go where I'd tell you to," says I, "and at forty a month you can figure how long it will be before you collect."

Hank, them fellers ain't got no sense of humor, and their sense of fair play is nothing to look at. I can say this much though: what Windy and Hondo forgot to do them fellers done to the queen's taste. I hate to go back to that doctor again, so I suffers in silence and alone.

Maybe you don't know how it is, Hank, never having been married, but when a married man is sorely wounded he hankers for the light touch of a woman's gentle hand and so forth. I gets out of the hen-house, wherein I had been cast, and picks my way up to Uncle Gabriel's.

Emmeline and Aunt Phoebe and Uncle Gabriel are out on the porch when I show up, and they all stand up when I get there.

"Well!" says Uncle Gabriel, "you must have handed an oncore to Windy and Hondo. We thought you was all heeled up again."

"I was," says I. "This was done by two other strong men."

"That explains it then," says he, setting down again. "'Cause I wondered how in thunder one man could do all that. Nothing small about you, Dobie—picking them two at a time."

"No," says I, "I ain't no piker, and I never picks on a man what is smaller than I am."

I said this for his benefit, Hank. You know I can always think of something funny to say at the right time, but at that, Hank, there ain't no fun in springing a good joke on a shepherd, 'cause all he said was:

"I had a dog like that once. He spent all his short life hunting for two dogs that he could whip at the same time. He never got a reputation as a fighter at that—everybody considered him loco."

"I didn't come up here to talk about dogs," says I. "I came up here to plead for succor."

"I'm glad you called yourself that, Dobie," says he, "'cause it shows you're commenced to get a glimmering of sense. When you going to take that job herding sheep and support your wife?"

"You really ought to do something now, Dobie," says Aunt Phoebe.

"I'm handicapped," says I, "I ain't got no gun and my stummick is so sore I can't stoop over and pick up a rock. Wait until I gets normal and I'll sure openly resent that offer, Mister Galesburg. If that is all the consolation you folks got to offer to a man in my condition I bids you all good-by."

Hank, I turns around, feeble-like, and limps away. I ain't quite to the gate when I hears Emmeline yell—

"Dobie, please for my sake, don't get into no more fights."

Emmeline ain't no bad scout, Hank, and she still has some consideration for her husband's feelings. I sneaks into the back door of the hotel, and goes up to my room but finds the door is locked.

Hank, that makes me mad. I ain't no roughneck, and my motter is a place for everything and everything in its place, and it seems to me that it's sort of out of place for them to lock my room up. I goes right down-stairs to give Sam Fletcher a piece of my mind, and in the office I runs into that blamed doctor. He's been drinking, and when he sees me he waltzes right up and says—

"Mister Dalton, it took you a long time to—my ——!"

He shoves his hat back on his head, and goes out of the door, talking to himself.

I sets down there on a chair and in a minute Sam Fletcher comes in and sets down at his desk behind the counter. He don't pay no attention to me, and it makes me sore, Hank, 'cause I believe in service. So I walks right over and leans on the counter and says—

"Mister Fletcher, I'll take my key."

He turns and looks at me, Hank. I reckon he can see that I'm in earnest, 'cause he reaches right over, takes the key off the nail, and hands it to me without taking his eyes off my face.

"My ——!" says he, with his mouth open, like a trout out of water, "Doc Wylie must have practised on you with the reverse English!"

I went up to my room and takes a look at my face in the glass. I sure am something to look at in the face, and when I tell you that a Hamburger steak is a pleasant-looking mess beside my features I ain't telling all I can see.

But there's something to look forward to, Hank. I ain't been down to the post-office for several days and I'm betting there's a

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letter from you with some money in it. I'll close now so I can post this when I go down. If Windy or Hondo tell you anything about me, you tell them that you heard they hopped me together and never gave me a chance. Them two can never be friends with me. Thanking you in advance for what I think I'm going to get, I beg to remain,

Very truly yours as ever,
DOBIE DALTON, gen. del.

Mesquite City, July 20

MR. HENRY HAWKINS,
Dear Sir:

It is useless for me to tell you that there wasn't no letters or money at the post-office for me, but I write to give you the satisfaction of knowing that I don't care no more. You know as well as I do that it is a surprise to me to have my best friend turn me down like this. If it was Windy or Hondo I'd expect it. There ain't no news so I won't waste valuable paper on you. I got disgusted with this town, Hank. Since I came here I ain't had nothing but vissitudes and grief, and when the feller, what runs the Antelope stage, asks me if I want to ride over with him I jumps at the chance.

Who do you think I runs into the first crack out of the box? Uncle Gabriel. He grins at me and asks me if I can't find nobody left in Mesquite to fight with. I told him that I was looking for a place where men knowed enough about fair play to come one at a time. That left him dumfounded, Hank, so I went up to a saloon, and got dumfounded myself, when I runs into Windy and Hondo. There's another feller with them and they're all stewed, and having a hy-iu time.

Windy looks me over, in a serious way, and then says:

"Dobie, your blood must be in bad condition, 'cause you ain't heeled up none since we hit you the first time. Go eat a dog-biscuit."

Hank, I just happens to think what Emmeline told me not to do, so I turns the joke on them like this:

"Windy, what you and Hondo done to me never hurt me no more than a kid with the measles. It just made me sore, so I went out and had a real fight."

"Yes," says Hondo, "you look it. Let's all have a drink."

There's one good thing about them fellers they don't hold a grudge. They sure treated me fine, and that other feller was a prince, too. We hit the high spots as long as we can keep going, and we sure showed that town a real visit.

When we can't find nothing more to do that extra feller loads us all into a livery rig, and we sings songs all the way back to Mesquite City. I went to sleep singing "The Holy City" and woke up in a manger in a livery stable the next morning. Hank, I sure was one sick person. I manages to get out and soak my head in a watering trough, and anything on earth looks better than I feel.

I goes out and sets down on the sidewalk, and along comes Uncle Gabe in a buggy.

"Get in, young feller," says he, and Hank, I was too sick to say no.

He takes me up to his house and puts me to bed. I'm writing this letter in Uncle Gabriel's house now, and Emmeline is making me a lemonade drink. Uncle Gabe says that if I keep on I'll be domesticated, whatever that is, Hank.

Well, Hank, there ain't no more news to write so will close. That extra feller what was with us at Antelope was the detective on the case. They've got Windy and Hondo in jail for robbing that bank, and you won't see them for some time. They confessed today.

I beg to remain yours truly,
DOBIE DALTON.

P. S. If you've got anything to say, Hank, send it to Antelope, Mont., care of Galesburg's sheep camp on Cinnamon Creek.

Mesquite, Mont., August 5

DEAR HANK:

Got your letter yesterday, and it is useless for me to tell you that it is the first one I ever got from you. A Mexican, by the name of Colorado Claro Maduro Sanchez brought the mail out to me, and I polished him on the head with a rock for opening it. If there was any money in it for me, Hank, you can kiss it good-by. I searched that greaser but he didn't have nothing on him but a onion, and he kept saying—

"Kin sabe, kin sabe!"

Maybe he can't now, Hank, but I'll bet he kin next time. Maybe that ain't up to my standard as a joke, but when you herd sheep

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for a few days your humor gets full of ticks.

I took this job to please Emmeline, my wife, and I hope she's pleased. If she tried to kiss me now, she'd have to operate on my face with a mower and then antiseptic me with sheep dip. You know me, Hank, and you know I'm naturally a clean person phisikally, taking baths sometimes when same is superfluous, but, Hank, I'm off it for a while.

We got a little spring, where we get our drinking water, et cettry, after straining wool and so forth from same. Well, I dug this here spring a little deeper and better, and decides to take a bath. There ain't nobody around that country but me, so I goes to my bath entirely nood.

Not to change the subject, Hank, but a feller ought to know more about the habits of sheep before he herds them, just like he ought to know more about his wife's relations before he marries her. Hank, a ram sheep is a he animal with curved horns like a corkscrew, and a blood lust. Me and you have always thought that shepherds goes crazy from hearing sheep blatting, but it ain't true. They go crazy from shock. I know what I'm telling you, Hank. I got a scientifik mind, and I don't have to get hit with a brick house to find out if I'm right or wrong.

Well, I dived around in that pool until I gets a lot cleaner than I was previous, and then I crawls out. The sun is hot, so I stoops over to grab up my shirt, and something hits me so hard that I gets my ears full of sand in the bottom of the spring. When I comes back to the top again, Hank, I'm looking in the face of a he-ram sheep. A ram sheep ain't so much to look into the face of, but it's the evil intentions you can read thereon.

"Mister Sheep," says I, "I'm going to come right out there to you and ride you to a frazzle."

You know I'm a good rider, Hank, and you know I can ride anything what wears hair and runs on four legs, and no hoarse can throw me. I grabs that ram sheep by one curly horn, yanks him half-way into the spring, and then hops on his back.

He was a big sheep, Hank, and I guess I was suffering from shock, 'cause I got on him backward. I don't mind telling you that no matter how good a rider a man is he's handicapped when he gets all them natural bucks reversed. It ain't hard to stick on a hoarse when he rears up, but when anything rears up in front of you, Hank, and sunfishes behind you at the same time, and when you ain't got nothing on but your birthday suit, and that animol's wool is wet, nobody can blame you if you don't linger around long.

I got dumped on my head and shoulders, Hank, and I feels like I had fell a mile. It sure knocked all the wind out of me. Hank, I know how a bad hoarse feels after he's been throwed and knocked silly, and then comes to and sees a lot of punchers standing around, all ready to throw him again.

I lays there and looks up at that congregation of ram sheep standing in a circle around me, and says to myself—

"When Emmeline finds my mangled corpse she'll be sorry she hounded me into herding sheep."

But at that, Hank, a ram ain't no sheep. It's a cross between a vishous pile-driver and a grizzly in sheep's clothing. Being used to greasers, what don't never take a bath, they don't know what to make of a fine specimen of American manhood in the rough.

I wish I knowed some way to get up on my feet without bending myself no place, Hank, but it can't be done, so I just yells: "Woof!" just like that, to scare them away, and then hops to my feet. Well, there must have been a sheep behind me, which was hard of hearing, 'cause I got shocked again, and when I quit going I sprawls out across a big ram sheep. I grabs him by the horn, and away we go off up a washout, with my two feet dragging and picking up every cactus in reach.

The feller what said that sheep will foller a leader said something, 'cause this herd is running a close second to us. Hank, you've heard the story about Lady Something-or-other, who rode a hoarse down the main street of a town, without enough clothes on to flag a handcar? She never had nothing on Mr. Dalton's son Dobie.

About four hundred yards above my camp is a big grove of cottonwood trees, and here we go up there: me in the lead, forking that scared-to-death ram, while strung out behind me in the dust comes the rest of the procession, blatting their fool heads off. I can't stop that fool sheep, and I can't afford to get off, so we parades right

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into that clump of trees, and I gets another shock.

There's a camp there, Hank, and that fool sheep takes me right between two ladies setting there on a log and two more setting on a grub-box. Like a fool I grabs that ram by the horns and tries to turn him like you would a bicycle, but instead of turning the blame thing stopped.

I suppose if I knowed more about sheep I'd a knowed how to start it going again, but I don't, so there ain't no argument. Hank, when them women gets a good look they all screeches like a flock of cougars with green-apple cramps, the same of which causes that he-sheep to jump right out from under me, and I lands on my head, with my feet across the tongue of a wagon.

When I gets up, Hank, I got a hoarse collar around my neck, but I don't stop to take it off. I ain't no thief, Hank, and it don't run in our fambly to take things what don't concern them, but what can a feller do in a case like that?

Say, Hank, did you hear about Windy and Hondo? They escaped from the jail. The sheriff didn't tell me how they got away. He just said that they busted some bars off a window.

Well, as I said before, I don't lose no time. I ducks down on my hands and knees and tries to hide behind a tree what ain't bigger than a fish-pole. I feels fairly safe, 'cause a hysterical woman don't never see nothing noway. She's like a runaway hoarse.

"My ——, Annie!" I hears one yelp. "Did you see that?"

Annie answers by running the scale with her voice, and then somebody squeaks—

"It must be a wild man!"

JUST then I shifts a little, Hank, and gets one knee in a cactus, and that woman ain't so far wrong at that. They do guess right at times. I rolls over to get a little further away, and just then I hears one of them screeching females yelp:

"Thank heaven! Help is at hand!"

"One letter too much in the word 'help,'" says I to myself, when I peeks out and sees Blazer and Sleepy ride into the clearing.

"The police are here!" exclaims a woman, and Hank, I has to grin to myself until I gets a look at the stars on the bosom of them hombres.

"Ma'am," says Sleepy, "what seems to be the matter? We comes to offer succor."

That was some conversation, Hank. Every one of them scared females tells him her life history from the cradle to the grave, and all at the same time. Taking out a few words that showed up plain between the volleys, I'm informed that the menfolks are all away hunting for sage hens, and that a wild something that was part sheep and part man had come into camp and attacked them. They finally beats it off.

"We're deputy sheriffs, ma'am," states Blazer. "We're part of a posse, and we're sure a pair of grand little protectors. Which way did it go?"

None of them seemed to know, Hank, which shows that they runs true to the species. Them fellers dismounts, and sort of mills around, looking for signs, while I hugs the ground, and wishes that I hadn't ate nothing for a week so I could lay flatter.

Blazer remarks something about sanitation around camps, and then he picks up a bucket of dirty water, and throws same all over me. Of course, he don't know I'm there, but that don't help none. Them cactus spines begins to itch, and I suffers a lot.

Pretty soon Blazer picks up a empty tomato can, and hits me right on the head with it, and then him and Sleepy states that while they ain't got much to do they'll clean up camp. Hank, them fellers sure did bombard me with all the refuse around that camp. With all the other directions to throw at, Hank, of course they has to pitch it all right at me, just because I happens to be laying behind a fringe of brush. It's human nature to throw rubbish out of sight.

"We're looking for a pair of escaped criminals, ma'am," states Sleepy, "they was bosom friends of a crazy shepherd out here, and we thought maybe they came out here to hive up with him."

"Desper-ah-does?" asks a female, and Hank, I has to laugh when Blazer says: "Of the most malignant type, ma'am. The shepherd is likely the worst one of the three, but there ain't no use arresting him 'cause the lunatic asylum is too crowded now."

The idea of calling Windy and Hondo desperate men, Hank. Well, just then I hears voices, and into camp comes them four sage hen hunters. It sort of attracts everybody's attention, and the way I had of getting out from them tin cans, et cettry, and leaving there wasn't no trouble at all.

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Hank, you know how fast I can run, and that I can just about beat anybody on earth, but you can cut my time half in two and get some idea of the speed I can show, when I ain't got nothing on to impede my progress, and when I got some place to go to quick.

I sails down a washout, which runs past my camp, and when I gets in behind my tent I takes a look but there ain't nobody coming, so I climbs out. I yawns and then walks, bold-like, around to the front of my tent, and Hank, I got another shock. Right there at the door of my tent, setting on a box, is Aunt Phoebe.

Down in the bottom stands Uncle Gabe's camp-supply wagon, and I can hear voices talking some place. Aunt Phoebe is hard of eyesight, and the first thing she does is to go after her specs.

Hank, you know me, and you know that I think quick, so when she tries to draw her specs on me I uses my brains like lightning. There's a hole about two feet square in my tent, about half-way up to the top, and I takes one long, handsome hop, and drops into that hole like a prairie-dog going home. My one aim in life is to get hold of a blanket.

Hank, this life of ours is full of mistakes, and a lot of them are things we can't help, like getting married before you find out all about her folks and so forth. I goes out of sight in that tent, about up to my waist, and lights with my legs around something what sure wasn't in that tent when I left it, and then one of the most blood-curdling yelps you ever heard comes forth.

I reaches outside and grabs the ridge-pole of that tent, and then I sees Emmeline go galloping off across the hills like a scared deer. Every time she hits the ground she lets out a whoop, and right behind her goes Aunt Phoebe. Auntie ain't built for speed, Hank, but she does well at that. She runs heavy like a draft hoarse.

I'm glad I wasn't riding for a prize, Hank, 'cause that thing what I'm setting on rises right up and gives a sudden heave, and stands me on my head outside. I'm getting so used to shocks that it don't faze me. You know I think awful quick, Hank, and my feet hadn't hit the dirt yet when I has my whole plan of operation layed out. Think I to myself—

"Whoever that was will come around to the hole side of the tent, so I'll go the other."

Wasn't that quick work, Hank? It sure takes brains to figure all that out so quick. The only trouble with it was the fact that I was figuring on what a normal man would do. It takes so many kinds of folks to make a world, Hank, that no matter how much brains you got you can't get your shot inside the black spot all the time.

Well, I hops up and lopes around the tent, and meets Uncle Gabe. He's loping, too, and he's got a ax in his hand, and all that ever saved my life was a guy-rope that tripped me, and I rammed my head into his stummick so hard that I has to take two steps back to get my hair out of his ribs. He was loping with his head turned around, so he never knew what hit him.

As I said before, Hank, a man ought to know more about his wife's relatives before he marries her. If I knowed how her uncle would behave under the circumstances I might stay there, but as it is I don't dare. I could have got his gun and stood him off, Hank, but he's just crazy enough to cause a scene, and make me kill him, and that would cause a fambly scandal and a row.

I ducks into that tent, grabs a red blanket and a rope, and away I goes again. I ain't got no place to go to, Hank, but this ain't no time to plan things out. I tell you again like I did before, it ain't the blatting what makes them go crazy—it's the shocks. If I hadn't been a brainy, well-balanced person I'd have likely gone crazy like a coyote and hunted for a moon to howl at. I went off up that gulch, with that red blanket tied around me like a apron, and Hank, I'm almost to the point where I talk to myself.

Hank, you say in your letter that you didn't understand what I meant about needing money. You must have skipped a lot of reading matter. I hope to be back there some fine day, and if you've still got them letters I'll set down with you and explain the points what you need cleared up for you. Maybe I used too big words for you, Hank.

Well, I went on up that gulch for miles, and after a while I sees a little cabin in a clump of trees. I've been wearing that blanket so long that I sort of takes up the habits of a Indian. There ain't a sign of anybody around there, so I pushes the door open and goes inside. There's a few things in there, Hank, and somebody has cooked a onion in there lately, 'cause I can smell same. I picks out a few of my choice cactus and then sets down to try on a pair of old

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boots, which are on the floor. I gets them on, Hank, but my feet swells right away. I hobbles around there hunting for something more to wear, when I hears voices outside.

I DON'T know who it is, so I ducks down and crawls under a low bunk. Pretty soon the door opens, and in comes Windy and Hondo first and behind them comes Blazer and Sleepy. I can see that Windy and Hondo ain't got no guns, and they seem sort of anxious to please. Sleepy comes over and lays a couple of rifles on the bunk over my head, and they all sets down.

"You fellers ain't got no howl coming," states Blazer. "If it was some of them other officers they'd prod you all the way to jail, and then you'd spend about fifteen years breaking up rocks."

"You sure can paint a glowing future," agrees Windy. "It sure don't appeal to me none, but I reckon it's the best we can do, eh, Hondo?"

"You gets plumb away," says Sleepy, "we splits the money four ways and reports that you ain't in this country. Leave that to me and Blazer, and rejoice that we ain't man-hunting for love or glory."

Hank, them feet of mine are killing me by this time.

"Show us the cache, and we'll settle this up now," says Blazer.

"Sure," says Windy. "She's under that left-hand bunk. You won't need a ax, 'cause the floor is all loose, anyway."

Hank, I'm under that left bunk. Know what I done? All to once I rolls out from under there and right among them, and grabs a rifle before anybody can say a word, and covers the bunch.

Hank, they acts like they'd seen a ghost. Blazer is leaning against the table, and his hand slips off and he falls flat on his face. Windy sets down on the floor from his chair, and jars the whole cabin. Hondo seems to be the only one to control his feelings, and he says:

"My ——! Darwin was wrong—it's the other way around!"

Hank, I sure had that bunch buffaloed. They just gasps at me and don't argue when I takes their guns. Windy is about my size, so I requests the loan of his clothes, and there ain't no argument. I lays five six-shooters on the table beside me, and them rifles on the floor, and them four pelicans sets there on a bunk while I dress. I can wear all of Windy's clothes except his boots, and maybe they'll fit but I can't get mine off.

Then I makes them all lay down on the floor, while I ties their feet together with a rope. Then I ties one end of the rope to the post of a bunk, and the other end to a log on the corner of the cabin. I searches them for knives, and then leaves them tied up tight. I digs up the money, as I figures to take it to Antelope, and notify the sheriff where he can get the outlaws. I don't figure that Blazer and Sleepy are a bit better than Windy and Hondo, and I sure wants that sheriff to see what he hired.

I gets on one hoarse and tries to lead the other three, but two of them gets away and I decides to just take the two. I'm all dressed up with cartridge belts et cettery, and I got that money in the saddle-bags. Also, Hank, I got misery in my feet. Them boots seems to shrink a inch at a time, and each and every boot has nails that seem to stick me plumb to the ankle bone.

I goes along across country, peaceful-like, and I feels uplifted in spite of my misery. Dobie Dalton is going to be a hero and show up Emmeline's fambly to a fare-thee-well. I tops a ridge, and my hat flips off. Sudden-like, she strikes me that there ain't no wind, and then I hears the spat of a rifle, and I sees some men cutting across in front of me.

Another shot seems to sort of aggravate my lead hoarse, and causes him to sort of ball things up. Another bullet sticks into the dirt in front of me, and fills my hoarse's eyes with sand.

You know I am awful strong in the arms, Hank, and no hoarse can get his head when I'm riding same, but you can't do nothing, when you got a punk headstall, and she busts the first time you pull hard, and the bridle all comes off.

Hank, that hoarse would win a prize most any place as a bucker, and the other one seems to get the habit, too, and we sure done a double sunfish off into the Mesquite, with me riding without no spurs to help out with and numb feet to brace with. If I'd' a' had some spurs to take the buck out of that son-of-a-gun's head I might a done some good for myself, but as it was, Hank, I reaches for the horn and got my hands full of grass, and then I don't know nothing.

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When I comes to I'm setting with my back against a tree, and a rope around my neck, and a lot of folks are discussing my past.

"Them is my two hoarses what was stole," says somebody. "We got the deadwood on this Jasper, and I argues that we better let human nature take its course."

"Might so well," agrees somebody. "He's plumb guilty, and also he's carrying that stolen money from Mesquite. He sure was heeled to resist arrest."

"Must be circumstantial," states a voice, and I recognizes Uncle Gabriel's voice. "This feller is my nephew by marriage, and while I ain't defending him for that reason, I don't think he's clever enough to do all this, and besides he's herding sheep for me, when these hoarses was stole. I moves that we wait until he wakes up so he can say something, or until the sheriff——"

"What about the sheriff?" asks a voice, and there sets the sheriff on his hoarse, and he's got them four fellers with him, linked together with a rope.

The crowd sort of loses interest in me, and goes over to the later attraction. There sure is some talk going on. Pretty soon I hears the sheriff say:

"Caught them making a sneak out of that old cabin up here a ways. Reckon they was taking a snooze, 'cause one of them had his boots in his hand."

I stands up and looks them over. Windy has got on some old clothes and when he sees me he puts his thumb to his nose at me. I says to the sheriff—

"You got two of your own posse, sheriff."

He looks at me and grins:

"Them two? Posse ——! There's a thousand dollars reward per each for them hombres. They're wanted down in Plains County. Stars ain't hard to get."

The feller what claimed I stole his animols turns to me and says—

"Where did you find that stolen money, young man?"

"You might ask them," says I, pointing at them four bad men.

"Crazy from sheep," says Windy. "None of us have seen him for a week."

"Sheep does strange things to folks," says the sheriff, and Hank, I don't care to argue with them. It ain't the sheep, it's shocks.

"You might as well take that rope off his neck," says the sheriff, and I says—

"If you're going to pass your generosity around in big gobs that way, you might take these boots off first—the rope don't hurt me none."

Well, Hank, I hobbles away with Uncle Gabe to where the supply-wagon is, and climbs on the seat beside of Emmeline. I sure am a weary person, Hank.

"Dobie," says Emmeline, "you simply can't keep out of trouble, can you?"

Hank there ain't no use arguing with a woman, so I ignores her, and pretty soon she says:

"Anyway, Dobie, I'm glad you're going out with us, 'cause I'd worry about you now. There's a crazy man or something around that camp. It jumped right in the tent, and chased auntie and me away over the hills. And then it knocked uncle down and hung a hoarse collar around his neck."

Uncle Gabe looks at me, kind of queer-like, Hank, and I wouldn't swear to it, but it looked like a wink, so I said—

"Better turn around and take me back to the sheep camp."

"No," says he, "I made this trip out here to take you back. I've sold out all my sheep."

Well, Hank, I ain't got no more job than a jackrabbit, so I'm writing to you, not for money, 'cause you can't understand that kind of talk, but I want you to go to the old man and say to him—

"Dobie Dalton is a danged good puncher and a upright honorable sort of a person, and he'd come back to the Lazy Y in a minute."

You know how to say it, Hank. Also you might say to him like this—

"Dobie is domesticated now."

Just tell it to him, offhand like, Hank. That ain't no lie—I am. I looks it up in a dictionary, and she says like this: Domesticate, to tame. That's me, Hank.

Well, there wasn't no news to write, Hank, but I just wanted you to know I'd come back there if they want me to. I got enough to take me and Emmeline back there if you don't waste too much time.

Yours very truly and sincerely,

DOBIE DALTON.

P. S. Hank, there wasn't no reward for the return of that money, but that blasted sheriff got three thousand for them four, and I could 'a' had it all if I hadn't made one little mistake. When you rope a man by the feet, Hank, you better take his boots off first.

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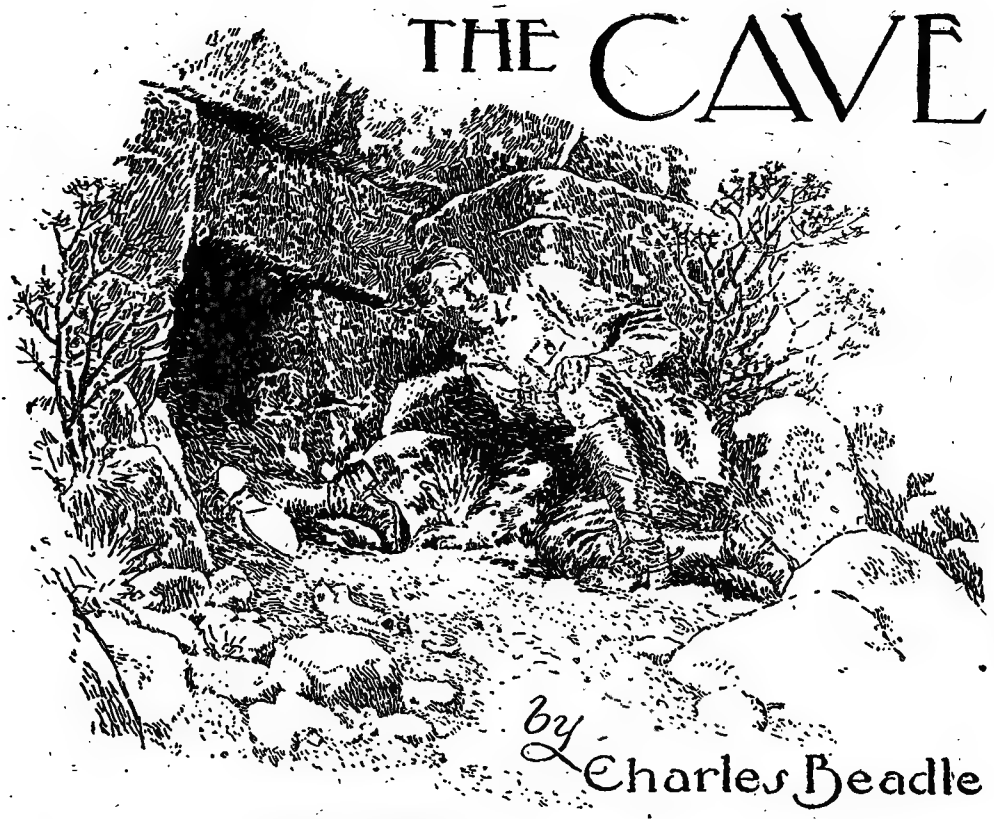
THE CAVE



by Charles Beadle

Author of "John O'Damn," "The Double Scoop," etc.

THREE troopers of the Rhodesian Mounted Police sat in a round hut facing three civilians.

"Well, we're mighty glad you're here," said the eldest, a tall man in worn khaki; "although—" he passed a lean hand over his beard—"although what in —— use you'll be without a machine gun, I don't know. I thought you had one at Motokes?"

"We had," assured the senior trooper, Blake, "but last year they commandeered it for the Mirewas affair and we've never got it back. I've had one on requisition ever since, but you know what the headquarters are. Is it going to be serious?"

"You'll probably know all about it by sun-rise tomorrow," asserted Newman Smith. "Did you notice that all the gully kraals are deserted? Munojumbo started it; but the loss of that fool nigger in No. 1 shaft fixed it—gave 'em the excuse the witch-doctors wanted. And since then the Uranya people have joined them. The drums have been going all night."

"Well," said Blake, lighting a cigaret, "there're six whites and eight Black Watch (native police) and they're Angoni's, and'll fight like tigers. That's fourteen guns."

"Yes, but we haven't got a well on the top of this hillock."

Blake and Newman Smith walked to the door and stared over a line of sandbags down the flat gully, which had once been a river bed, where the heat sizzled upon the blackened maize fields and scrub.

"You see we can't cover the well without a gun, and the first thing they'll do will be to poison it."

"—— headquarters!" muttered Blake.

He gazed comtemplatively over the boulder-strewn koppjes to the southwest where, about three miles away, rose a conical hill above its fellows.

"Do you happen to know the altitude of that chap over there?"

"Two thousand seven fifty," replied Newman Smith promptly.

"Good," commented Blake, reflectively.

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"I could pick up Mirewas from there with the helio."

"You'll never get through by daylight."

"I know. We'll make a night dash, and get the morning sun. Moon sets about three, don't it? We'd better start at the half-hour. They'll probably attack at dawn, and you can keep 'em amused and give us a chance to get through." He turned to the other troopers in the hut. "Charleton, you're the lighter, so you come with me. I'll leave you in charge, Carter. And if we don't get through you can tell headquarters to—but I guess you won't if we don't. And you'd better let Charleton have your mare. She's faster. It's a dash or nothing. Come on, let's have a drink!"

AS THE silver of the moon faded to the deep sapphire of starlight the horses were saddled, water-bottles were newly filled and heliograph stands strapped to the saddles. Carbines were left for the benefit of the besieged; revolvers were handier. At the half-hour the two men mounted; dim shadows in the gloom. Camel, who had been a water-cart horse of the Dragoons in the Rebellion of '95, towering above the ex-polo pony, Lady, for even a smart corps can not be particular where salted horses are necessary.

From the hillside came the distant throb of drums. A jackal yelped intermittently down the gully. A grip of the hands, a whispered "good luck," and they were gone down the farther side of the hillock.

Camel's great hoofs clattered alarmingly upon the granite outcrops; but once they had reached the soft soil of the river bed they plodded along quietly enough. Blake dared not enter the denser woods bordering the koppje-side for the ground was thickly strewn with boulders.

Twice they pulled up to listen. Still continued the drums and the chanting. A distant hyena yowled dismally. They gained the last of the maize fields and entered the light timber and scrub beyond. Blake sighed.

"I guess we're through!" he whispered. "Look, there's the dawn!" Then his keen eyes caught something which moved. "Quick! Left! Canter! Gallo-p!"

They drove home their spurs. Camel grunted and plunged away. A loud yell rang out. The bushes vomited figures. As Blake filed behind him other forms rose up in their path. Cries and yells sounded on all sides. Charleton fired. Came a terrific report and a flare of flame almost under Blake's horse. Both animals swerved violently.

"Run for it!" shouted Blake.

Spurs assisted fright in the speed of the two horses. Ponderous Camel, whose canter was like an earthquake, lay down to it like a hartebeeste. Lady shot ahead. Yells and another crash of a blunderbus came from behind them.

As Camel thundered across a piece of bare ground the dim form of Lady disappeared. A crash as of undergrowth was followed by an exclamation and a hearty curse. Blake pulled up.

"What's the matter?"

"Hole," came Charleton's voice. "——! My leg's caught. Go on!"

Turning 'round in his saddle Blake stared down the back trail.

"Try! For God's sake!" he shouted. "Quick! I'll hold 'em off."

The snorts of the pony and Charleton's curses mingled with an outburst of yells. Blake fired at a moving object. A scream followed and a renewed outburst of yells reverberated in the adjacent koppje as Charleton shouted:

"I'm free! I'm free!"

Blake fired again and heard Charleton's exclaiming—

"Oh, my God, Lady's done for!"

"Up, quick, you fool!" yelled Blake emptying his revolver, and kicking free his off stirrup. "Quick! Leave her!"

As he felt the weight and Charleton's hands around his waist, he drove home the spurs. Charleton opened fire. But Camel, terrified, pulled stupidly at his bit. Blake cursed and punched Camel's head to get him 'round. A form rose out of the grass almost beneath them as Camel jibbed. A spear glinted in the pale light. Charleton fired point-blank. Camel bounded forward as the warrior twirled and dropped into the grass.

"Game-trap!" gasped Charleton as they galloped. "Broke her back, I think. Oh, ——, I can't even get the cartridges in!"

"——!" Blake's legs were desperately drumming the flanks of the horse which was blowing heavily. "What the devil's the matter with the beast!"

The answer came as Camel crashed

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forward, throwing both riders over his head. Blake was on his feet first.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "he's done too!"

In the flanks stuck a spear flaying violently as the beast struggled.

"We must run for it! Only chance!"

"But I've lost my gun!" ejaculated Charleton.

A yell close at hand echoed in the koppje. Charleton stared disconsolately around.

"Don't stand there like a —— fool!" shouted Blake. "Make for the hills! Come on!"

They went off at a lope. The denser forest of the hillside was about a quarter of a mile away. On the fringe they paused to listen. The savages were hot on their trail, an easy trail made by their boots in the soil. Cries to one another sounded near at hand. Suddenly came a distant crackling of rifles.

"They're at it!" exclaimed Blake. "We must ha' run into a fresh party! ——! Come on!"

They ran on up the hill slope, their boots ringing on the granite outcrops.

"Ought to be—a scream—other side," panted Charleton. "Lose 'em."

"Never do it," gasped Blake. "Look out for a cave."

The roar of a musket, a yell and the smack of a pot-leg on an adjacent boulder drove them to racing speed. The yells were repeated close behind.

"God, I'm nearly done!" gasped Charleton.

Up, up they struggled, stumbling over loose stones, slipping on rock. Their lungs seemed to crackle like brown paper. The boulders grew thicker and bigger as they mounted. Again came the bang of a musket as they scrambled across an open ledge. A yell drew a hurried glance to the bronze form of a warrior leaping from boulder to boulder.

"Double!" panted Blake.

They dodged 'round a great conical boulder. Charleton's boots skated on rock. He sat down.

"I'm done!" he choked. "Go on!"

"No, no!" Then with a triumphant gasp: "God! Here!"

Immediately behind Charleton was a hole which appeared to be the entrance to one of the caves with which these koppjes are honeycombed. Charleton threw himself forward, and followed Blake on hands and knees into the darkness. They crawled hurriedly at first, very conscious of a possible shot into the cave; then more cautiously began to feel their way. The darkness was as dense as sepia; but the sounds of their movements echoed vastly. They lay still and listened, trying to control their breathing. The gray of the dawn was a pale smudge like the indefinite sense of light caused by pressure upon the eyeballs. There was no sound save a drip of water; each tiny splash magnified to a fantastic *clop* like the beat of a failing heart.

The labor of the lungs seemed like the panting of a great beast: other sound was there none.

"D'you think that they've missed the trail?" whispered Charleton.

"Crossing that ledge has put 'em off—probably. Listen!" Faint cries were just audible. "Perhaps they think the caves are haunted—got any matches?"

"Yes." Charleton fumbled. "Oh, ——, I've sprained my wrist or broken it. Funny I never noticed it—ow! Yes, here they are. Have you?"

"Yes, of course—I—oh, confound it! It's chocolates—and oh, my God, I've lost my cartridge pouch!"

"Doesn't matter. I've got plenty."

"Sh!"

A shout outside startled them. The grim glow of the mouth of the cave was obliterated.

"Quick! They've trailed us!" whispered Blake.

MORE shouts, the rattle of loose stones and the light blinked as they scuttled like crabs into the recesses of the cave. Some loose objects tinkled musically in their passage over the rough floor. A spurt of flame illuminated furrowed walls and a yard of curved roof as a lightning flash would do. Then a deafening concussion half-stunned them as they flattened their bodies on the ground.

The impact of a pot-leg or chopped wire against the cave walls showered them with splintered rock. The drip of the water pierced the roar in the ear-drums like a steel punch going through an iron plate. Blake screwed his head 'round from one side to the other seeking the glow of the entrance. The light blinked several times and remained open. The murmur of voices came.

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"What's happened?" whispered Charleton.

Blake fumbled with his hand to silence him. He touched rough rock only. The light went out again; stones rattled; some one grunted. They were entering the cave.

Instinctively Blake scrambled on in the darkness. Voices reverberated. He plunged on again hurriedly. He bumped his head into a wall; felt with his hand and followed it. Again came a blinding flash and a terrific concussion. Only a vision of the rock in front of his eyes remained. As he listened intently the drip of the water sounded farther away. Voices mumbled. He peered to the right for the light; then to the left. Blackness.

"There must be a man in the entrance," he thought.

He lay rigid.

The murmur of voices died away; only the solemn *clop-p clop-p* remained. He stared anxiously. Blackness. Strange. What were they doing? Where was Charleton. He put out his hand. Nothing. He crawled on, fumbling cautiously; and on again. Empty air. Queer. And yet again. . . He stopped: listened.

Clop-p! clop-p!

Ah, he had mistaken his direction and crawled away from the wall. But where was the light—and Charleton? The niggers couldn't stop right in the entrance all the time. He strained to see. Blackness. He sat very still. Unconsciously he had visualized the cave as round; but these koppjes were honeycombed with caves.

"Charleton!" he whispered.

Clop-p! Clop-p!

Then in a very loud voice—

"Charleton!"

"—rleton!" came back to him.

"Oh, God!"

"—od!"

Spasmodically he pawed at his eyes. Utter darkness. Panic shook him. He controlled himself. All sense of direction was lost. The longer he tried to think the more confused he became. He clutched at his revolver—but there were no cartridges; and even his sense of touch appeared to have gone wrong, for his own body felt queer. And matches!

"Oh, God!"

"—od!" mocked him.

What had happened to Charleton? Where was he? Action clamored to stop imagination. He began to crawl—on and on—and on.

But perhaps he was crawling in a circle. He sat still. Fool! Why not walk? He stood up cautiously, queerly uncertain of his equilibrium. But he strode forward boldly, hands out fumbling; wincing at imagined obstructions. A blow on the head knocked him down.

He hit out wildly, thinking that he was attacked; then he sat still, scared, realizing that the roof was low. After ten seconds of pawing the air around him he began to crawl again. He was conscious of an unpleasant odor. At last his nail scratched rock. He stopped; listened; shouted strenuously.

"—rleton!"

The mocking echo drove him on in desperation—to the left, having no choice. He came upon a sharp corner. He wriggled 'round hopefully, staring for a glimpse of light. Odd things rattled beneath him with a musical twinkle. The wall curved 'round; made a sharp bend and came to another abrupt corner. Queer. He stretched out a hand—and touched the other side. Unconsciously he had crawled through an aperture not four feet wide.

Despair paralyzed him. The caves might be miles long like a bee's hive. He sat deadly still, listening to that infernal *clop, clop-p!* Was Charleton lost too? Was he killed? What was this horrible stench? Thoughts tore through his mind—ever centering upon his own predicament—buried alive!

He started violently. Something was moving.

"Charleton!" he screamed.

"—rleton!"

He groaned; listened. Something was breathing. He stared. A dim spot of phosphorescent green kissed his aching eyes. The distant mouth of the cave! But there were two spots!

Charleton was . . . But human eyes do not shine. Blake remained rigid, staring. That stench! His fingers touched something smooth and light—and jagged. Bones.

He gripped the empty revolver. Frantically he fumbled in his mind. He clutched for his only weapon—a pocket hunting-knife; tore open the big blade and shrank against the wall of the lair.

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What would the beast do? Would it spring? He desired to swear madly; desired to rush in and meet death half-way. The universe had dwindled to twin dim emeralds.

The breathing became quicker. A faint snarl quivered. He crouched as if imitating the brute. Suddenly the eyes grew bigger —and rose. At one green glow he stabbed with all his force.

A nightmare of writhing muscles and tearing claws; of stabbing desperately; of warm liquid—and of sinking through space.

A GALE of innumerable suns—incredible murmur of voices. A spasmodic attempt to renew the fight brought excruciating pain. Distinctly a voice said—

"All right, old boy!"

He sank back blinking. Slowly his eyes focused; he became conscious of the identity of a face bending over him against yellow sunlight on blue rock; Charleton's features with a bandage across the forehead. Another figure, familiar, loomed beside Charleton.

"Why, Doc——"

"That's all right. You must lie quiet, my boy."

But Charleton observed the bewildered demand in Blake's eyes.

"A splinter of rock or chopped wire, caught me on the head"—he touched his bandage—"and stunned me, old man. You must ha' got lost. When I came to I tried to find you, but matches gave out; so I cleared off and helio'd to M'rowas. We had a —— of a job to find you. You must have wandered half a mile."

Blake's eyes wandered as if in search of something.

"Yes," added Charleton, "you got badly mauled, old man; but you must ha' put up a —— of a scrap. He's a beauty, eh?"

He indicated a full-grown leopard strung by the feet to a pole.

"Now try to sleep. The ambulance will be here in about an hour."

THE PROFESSIONAL BEGGARS OF SOKOTO

by THOMAS S. MILLER

OUR beggars clothe themselves in rags and dirt, and if perchance they own a hunchback, or have lost a leg or hands or sight their misfortunes are their assets in their attack through the sympathies on the generosity of the public. Far otherwise is it with the Hausa beggars of Sokoto, in the hinterlands of West Africa. There begging is a recognized profession, being, as with ordinary crafts, a hereditary vocation, with strictly limited membership, the customs and prerogatives of the profession being handed down from father to son with great secrecy.

The professional beggar is a sleek, well-dressed, self-important rascal who travels with a large retinue. He visits the open market-places, at the sun-down hour, when in torrid Sokoto the market hums and thrives at its busiest, where he swaggers up and down in great state, proclaiming in a loud voice the donors of other towns. Suddenly he will stop before the stall of a prosperous-looking merchant, or will halt a passing chief and implore him in the name of Allah to present him with the article that has taken his fancy.

Rarely is the request refused, for the rascal knows his power. At the least sign of hesitation on the part of the victim he has selected he will loudly brand him stingy and mean. He has a fine stock of scornful proverbs and cutting sarcasms on tap, and furthermore threatens to spread a report of the unfortunate man's stinginess throughout the towns and villages. In nine cases out of ten the victim will hand over the coveted article, when the professional beggar instantly changes his tune to the most flowery and extravagant praise.

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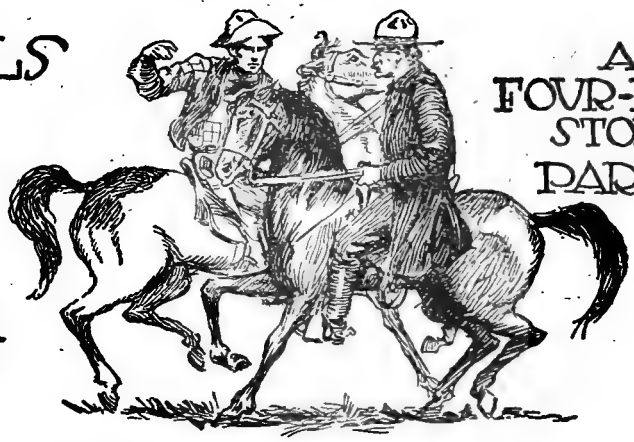
The BELLS of SAN JUAN

A FOUR-PART STORY PART 2



by JACKSON GREGORY

Author of "Yahoya," "Silver Slippers," etc.

The first part of the story quickly retold in story form

THERE are many San Juans, but only one San Juan of the bells. High in the mission tower they hang, and when a baby is born, or a strong man dies, or there is a wedding or a discovery of gold, their ringing chants the message to the little desert town.

The girl from the city had been in San Juan but a few hours when she heard the bells toll dismally.

"What does it mean?" she asked Ignacio Chavez, the bell-ringer.

"There is a man dead," replied the half-breed, "and there will be more work for Roderico Nortone."

But it was not until later in the day that Rod Norton, the young sheriff, heard the tolling bells as he rode across the desert. Straight back to town he raced and went to the Casa Blanca, saloon, gambling-house, and ante-room to perdition, owned by his enemy, the vicious Jim Galloway. There he found that a sheep-herder from Las Palmas had been killed.

"Who did it?" he asked.

"I did," retorted "Kid" Rickard, a sullen youth with a low forehead and pale blue eyes.

"Who saw the shooting?"

"Jim Galloway and Antone."

Antone was one of Galloway's henchmen.

The sheriff at once started a cross-examination. The slayer and the witnesses told straight, consistent stories. Rickard had shot in self-defense, they said. Finally Norton went in to look at the corpse of Bisbee, the dead sheep-herder.

"Does any one know where Bisbee kept his money?" he asked.

"In his boots," answered two voices together.

The men crowded about the body as Norton's voice rang out—

"Then tell me, Jim Galloway, how does it happen that the right boot is on the left foot?"

Norton left the place without making any arrests and went straight to Struve's Hotel. On the door he noticed a new sign:

DR. V. D. PAGE
PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON
ROOM 5, STRUVE'S HOTEL

There was an old bullet wound on his hand that needed attention. He went to room five and knocked. The door was opened by the girl from the city.

"Is Dr. Page in?" asked Rod.

"Come in," replied the girl. "I am Dr. Page."

THAT night the two met again at the home of John Engle, San Juan's banker. Norton went to call on Florence Engle. Virginia Page bore a letter of introduction to the Engles, from a common friend. She was greeted warmly by Mr. and Mrs. Engle, but Florrie's manner was rather cool. The banker told her about Rod Norton:

Billy Norton, the young man's father, had been sheriff before him. He had promised to "get" Jim Galloway of the Casa Blanca. But Galloway, or one of his men, had "got" Norton first, shooting him in the back. Young Roderick, who had returned from college three years before to manage his father's ranch, at once ran for the office left vacant by the elder Norton's death. He was elected by a huge majority.

As Engle finished his story another caller was announced. It was Caleb Patten, dapper, conceited, and hitherto San Juan's only physician. His manner indicated plainly his disdain for the "lady doctor."

Norton finally took his departure. A few moments later a boy came to the door saying that Ignacio Chavez, the bell-ringer, was ill, and wished the lady doctor to attend him.

Virginia left at once, accompanied by Engle. Outside they met Norton.

"I sent the boy," he said. "It was a ruse, 'Brocky' Lane is hurt bad and I want Miss Page to ride out with me to see him. I can't trust Caleb Patten."

An hour later the girl was riding northward toward Mount Temple, where lay the wounded 'Brocky' Lane. Norton rode by her side.

"Lane is foreman of a big cattle ranch," he explained, "and is secretly working with me and my deputy, Tom Cutter. He has been shot down by

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Moraga, one of Galloway's men. We got Moraga, luckily.

"But we must not let Galloway know that Lane was anywhere near Mount Temple or that he or Cutter or I have the least interest in the place. That is the reason for all this secrecy."

They reached Mount Temple and dismounted. After climbing for what seemed to the girl must be hours, they stopped to rest on the mountain-side.

As Virginia Page lay under the midnight sky and watched the clear-cut profile of the young sheriff, she felt strangely glad that she had come to San Juan.

Norton knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Ten minutes more and we'll be there," he said. "Ready?"

CHAPTER VII

THOSE remaining ten minutes tried all that there was of endurance in Virginia Page. Often Norton, bidding her wait a moment, climbed on to some narrow ledge above her and, drawing the rope steadily through his hands, gave her what aid he could; often, clinging with hand and foot she thought breathlessly of the sheer fall of cliff which the darkness hid to her eyes but which grew ever steeper in her mind as she struggled on.

He had said it would be easier in daylight; she wondered if after all it would not have been more difficult could she have seen just what were the chances she was taking at every moment. But more and more she came to have utter faith in the quiet man going on before her and in the piece of rope which stretched taut between them.

"And now," said Norton at last, when once more he had drawn her up to him and they stood close together upon a narrow ledge, "we've got a good, safe trail under foot. Good news, eh?"

But as he moved on now he kept her hand locked tight in his own. Their "good, safe trail," was a rough ledge running almost horizontally along the cliff-side, its trend upward but scarcely perceptibly so. Within twenty steps it led them into a wide, V-shaped fissure in the rocks. Then came a flat space, a sort of cup in a nest of rugged peaks, its bottom filled with imprisoned soil worn from the spires above and caught here. And as Norton, relinquishing her hand, went forward swiftly she heard a man's voice saying weakly——

"That you, Rod?"

"I came as soon as I could, Brocky." Norton, standing close to a big outjutting boulder upon the far side of the cup, was bending over the prone form of the cattleman. "How are you making out, old man?"

"I've sure been having one —— of a nice little party," grunted Brocky Lane faintly. "A man's so —— close to heaven on these mountain-tops—who's that?"

Virginia came forward quickly and went down on her knees at Lane's side.

"I'm Dr. Page," she said quietly. "Now if you'll tell me where you're hit—and if Mr. Norton will get me some sort of a light, a fire will have to do——"

Another little grunt came from Brocky Lane's tortured lips, this time a wordless expression of his unmeasured amazement.

"I didn't want Patten in on this," Norton explained. "Miss Page is a doctor; just got into San Juan today. She's a cousin of Engle. And she knows her business a whole lot better than Patten does, besides."

"Will you get the fire started immediately, Mr. Norton?" asked Virginia somewhat sharply. "Mr. Lane has waited long enough as it is."

"I'll be ——!" said Brocky Lane weakly. And then, more weakly still, in a voice which broke despite a manful effort to make it both steady and careless. "I never cuss like that unless I'm delirious, anyhow I never cuss when there's a lady——"

"If you'll keep perfectly still," Virginia admonished him quickly. "I'll do all the talking that is necessary. Where is the wound?"

"You don't have to have a light, do you?" Brocky insisted on being informed. "You see, we can't have it. Where'm I hurt, you want to know? Mostly right here in my side where there's a hole——"

Virginia's hands had already found the rude bandage, damp and sticky.

"It's nonsense about not having a light," she said, turning toward Norton.

"No," said the wounded man. "Nonsense nothing, is it Rod? How're we going to have a fire when my matches are all gone and Rod's matches ——"

"Mr. Norton," Virginia cut in crisply, "in spite of your friend's talk and in spite of the bluff he is putting up he is pretty badly hurt. You give me some sort of a light, I don't care if they see it down at San Juan, or you shoulder the responsibility. Which is it?"

"Brocky has done his part," answered

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Norton promptly. "You're ready to do yours. I guess it's up to me to do mine."

With no further explanation he had turned and was gone in the darkness; to Virginia's eyes it seemed that he was swallowed up by the cliffs themselves, as though they had opened and accepted him and closed after him. She supposed that he had gone to seek what scanty dry fuel one might find here. But in a moment he was back, was striking a match, had lighted a lantern.

"Look here, Rod—" expostulated Brocky.

"Shut up, Brocky," answered Norton quietly. And, passing the lantern to the girl, "If you'll carry that I'll carry Brocky. It's only a few steps and I won't hurt him. We can make him more comfortable there; and besides, we can't leave him out here in the sun tomorrow."

Somewhat mystified, Virginia took the lantern and her own surgical case from the sheriff and watched him stoop and gather the tall form of his friend into his arms. Then going the way he indicated, straight across the tiny flat, she lighted the way. She heard the wounded man groan once; then, his teeth set to guard his lip, Brocky was silent.

A dozen steps and she came to a steep-sided, narrow chasm in the rocks, a passageway not six-feet wide which twisted this way and that before her so that at no time could she see more than a dozen steps ahead.

"Look out," called Norton sharply. "Watch where you step now. Go slow."

Virginia swinging her lantern up shoulder-high, looking ahead, grew instantly stock still, a shiver tingling along her spine. The narrow defile through which she had passed had led out of the ring of peaks about the cup where they had found Brocky Lane and now abruptly debouched into nothingness. As she had turned with the twisting passageway, expecting to see another wall of rock before her, she saw instead the sky filled with stars. She stood almost at the edge of a sheer precipice.

"Throw the light to the left now," commanded Norton. "See what looks like the entrance to a cave? We go in there."

She walked on, moving slowly, warily, a little faint from the one startled view before her, her body tight-pressed to the rocks upon the left, her feet only a pace from the edge of the cliff. Now she saw the mouth of the cave, a black ragged hole just above a flat rock which thrust itself outward so that it seemed hanging, balanced insecurely, over the abyss. By the pale rays of the lantern she saw the fairly smooth, gently sloping floor of the cavern; then, stooping, she passed in and turned and held the light for Norton.

He came on steadily, neither fast nor slow, sure-footed, bearing his burden lightly. Still holding the lantern for him, turning as he came closer, she saw that the cave was lofty and wide, that it ran farther back into the mountain than her lantern's rays could follow.

"Back there," said Norton, "you'll find some blankets. I'll hold him while you spread some out for him."

She hurried toward the farther end of the cave, came to a tumble of blankets against the wall, dragged out two or three, spreading them quickly. And then, while Norton was stooping to lay Brocky's limp form down, she busied herself with her case.

"He has fainted," she said quickly. "I'd like to examine the wound before he is conscious; it's going to hurt him. Pour me some water into any sort of basin or cup or anything else you've got here. Then stand by to help me if I need you. Hold the lantern for me."

SWIFTLY, but Norton marked with what skilful fingers, she removed the rude bandage which Tom Cutter had made, drew the shirt away from the torn side, made her examination. Norton, squatting upon his heels at her side, holding the lantern, after one frowning look at the wound, kept his eyes fixed upon her face. Brocky Lane was near his death and Roderick Norton knew it after that one look; his life lay, perhaps, in the hands of this girl. Norton had brought her when he might have brought Patten. Had he chosen wrongly?

He had noted her hands before; now they seemed to him the most wonderful hands ever possessed by either man or woman, strong, sure, quick, sensitive, utterly capable. He thought of Caleb Patten's hands, thick, a little inclined to be flabby.

"Open that bottle," she directed coolly. "One tablet into the water. That box has cotton and gauze in it—don't touch them! I want everything clean; just open the box and set it where I can get it."

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One by one she gave her directions and the man obeyed swiftly and unquestioningly. He watched her probe at the wound, saw her eyes narrow, knew that she had made her diagnosis. As she washed the ugly hole in the flesh and made her own bandage Brocky Lane was wincing, his eyes again open. Both men were watching her now, the same look in each eager pair of eyes.

But until she had done and had, with Norton's help, made Lane as comfortable as possible upon his crude bed, she gave no answer to their mute pleading. Then she sat down upon the stone floor, caught her knees up in her clasped hands and looked long and searchingly into Brocky Lane's face. The cowboy struggled with his muscles and triumphed over them, summoning a sick grin as he muttered—

"You're mighty good to take all this trouble—I'm sure a hundred times obliged ——"

"And," she cut in abruptly, "you mean to tell me that you shot that man after he had put this hole in you? And then made him crawl out of the brush and come to you?"

"I sure did," grunted Brocky. "And if my aim hadn't been sort of bad, me being all upset this way, I wouldn't have just winged old Moraga that way, either! When he's all cured up and I'm all well again——"

Then he broke off and again his eyes, like Norton's, asked their question. And now she answered it, speaking slowly and thoughtfully.

"Mr. Brocky Lane, I congratulate you on three things: your physique first, your luck second and third, your nerve. They are a combination that is hard to beat. I am very much inclined to the belief that in a month or so you'll be about as good as new."

Norton expelled a deep breath of relief; he realized suddenly that whatever this gray-eyed, strong-handed girl had said would have had his fullest credence. Brocky's grin grew a shade less strained.

"When you add to that combination," he muttered, "a sure enough angel come to doctor a man——"

"Growing delirious again," laughed Virginia. "Give him a little brandy, Mr. Norton. Then a smoke if he's dying for one. Then we'll try to get a little sleep, all of us. You see, I had virtually no sleep on the train last night and today has been a big day for me. If I'm going to do your friend any good I've got to get three winks. And, unless you're made out of reinforced sheet-iron, it's the same for you. You can lie down close to Mr. Lane so that he can wake you easily if he needs us. Now," and she rose wearily, still smiling but suddenly looking unutterably weary, "where is the guest-chamber?"

She did not tell them that not only last night but the night before she had sat up in a day-coach, saving every cent she could out of the few dollars which were to give her and her brother a new start in the world; there were many things which Virginia Page knew how to keep to herself.

"This way," said Norton, taking up the lantern. "We can really make you more comfortable than you'd think."

At the very least he could count confidently to treating her to a surprise. She followed him for forty or fifty feet toward the end of the cave and to an irregular hole in the side wall, through this, and into another cave, smaller than the first but as big as the ordinary room. The floor was strewn with the short needles of the mountain pine. As she turned, looking about her, she saw first another opening in a wall suggesting still another cave; then feeling a faint breath of the night air on her cheek she saw a small rift in the outer shell of rock and the stars thick in the sky.

"May you sleep well in Jim Galloway's hang-out," said Norton lightly. "May you not be troubled with the ghosts of the old cliff-dwellers whose house this was before our time. And may you always remember that if there is anything in the world that I can do for you all you have to do is let me know. Good night."

"Good night," she said.

He had left the lantern for her. She placed it on the floor and went across her strange bedroom to the fissure in the rock through which the stars were shining. It seemed impossible that those stars out there were the same stars which had shone upon her all of her life long. She could fancy that she had gone to sleep in one world and now had awakened in another, coming into a far, unknown territory where the face of the earth was changed, where men were different, where life was new.

And though her body was tired her spirit did not droop. Rather an odd exhilaration was in her blood. She had stepped from an

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old, outworn world into a new one and with a quick stir of the pulses she told herself that life was good where it was strenuous and that she was glad that Virginia Page had come to San Juan.

"And now," she mused sleepily when at last she lay down upon heaped-up pine needles and drew over her the blanket Norton had brought, "I am going to sleep in the hang-out of Jim Galloway and the old home of the cliff-dwellers! Virginia Page, you are a downright lucky girl!"

Whereupon she blew out her lantern, smiled faintly at the stars shining upon her, sighed wearily and went to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

AS FULL consciousness of her surroundings returned slowly to her Virginia Page at the first thought that she had been awakened by the aroma of boiling coffee. Then, sitting up, wide awake, she knew that Norton had come to the doorway of her separate chamber and had called. She threw off her blanket and got up hastily.

It was still dark. She imagined that she had merely dozed and that Norton was summoning her because Brocky Lane needed her attention. A dim glow slipped through the cave entrance, a flickering, uncertain light eloquent of a camp-fire. As she turned toward this light, her hands going swiftly and femininely to her hair, she heard Norton's voice in a laughing remark. Then she knew that she had slept three or four hours, that the dawn was near, that it was time for her to return to San Juan.

"Good morning," she said brightly, for all of the fatigue still heavy upon her.

Norton, squatting by the fire, frying-pan in hand, turned and answered her nod; Brocky Lane, flat on his back with his hands clasped behind his head, a cigaret in his mouth, twisted a little where he lay, his eyes eager upon his doctor. Virginia came on into the full light, striking the stubborn pine needles from her riding-habit as she came.

"Time to eat and ride," said Norton, turning again to his task. "Bacon and coffee and exercise. Have you rested?"

"Perfectly. And Mr. Lane?"

"Me?" said Brocky. "Feeling fine."

Norton gave her a cup full of warm water to wash her hands. Then she made a second, very careful examination of Brocky's wound, cleansing it and adjusting a fresh bandage.

"I want to start in half an hour," said the sheriff. "There'll be light enough then so that we can make time getting down to the horses and not enough light to show us up to a chance early rider down below. Then we'll swing off to the west, make a wide bend, come through Las Estrellas and get back into San Juan when we please. That is you will; I'll leave you outside of Las Estrellas, showing you the way. And, while we eat, I am going to tell you something."

"About Galloway?" she asked quickly. "Explaining what you meant by Galloway's hang-out?"

"Yes. And more than that."

For a little she stood up, looking at him very gravely. Then she spoke in utter frankness.

"Mr. Norton, I think that I can see your position; you were so circumstanced through Mr. Lane's being hurt that you had to bring either Dr. Patten or me here. You decided it would be wiser to bring me. There is something of a compliment in that, isn't there?"

"You don't know Caleb Patten yet!" growled Brocky a bit savagely.

"Already it seems to me," she went on, "that you have a pretty hard row to hoe. It is evident that you have discovered a sort of thieves' headquarters here; that, for your own reasons, you don't want it known that you have found it. To say that I am not curious about it all would be talking nonsense, of course. And yet I can assure you that I hold you under no obligation whatever to do any explaining. You are the sheriff and your job is to get results, not to be polite to the ladies."

But Norton shook his head.

"You know what you know," he said seriously. "I think that if you know a little more you will more readily understand why we must insist on keeping our mouths shut —all of us."

"In that case," returned the girl, "and before you boil that coffee into any more hopelessly black a concoction than it already is, I am ready to drink mine and listen. Coffee, Mr. Lane?"

"Had mine, thanks," answered Brocky. "Spin the yarn, Rod."

Norton put down his frying-pan, the

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bacon brown and crisp, and rose to his feet.

"Will you come this way a moment, Miss Page?" he asked. "To begin with, seeing is believing."

She followed him as she had last night, the entire length of the cave in which Brocky lay, through the rock door and into the cave in which she had slept. But Norton did not stop here. He went on, Virginia still following him, and came to that other hole in the rock wall which she had noted by the lantern light.

"In here," he said. "Just look around."

He swept a match across his thigh, holding it up for her to see. She came to his side and looked in. First she saw a number of small boxes, innocent-appearing affairs which suggested soda crackers. Beyond them was something covered with a blanket; Norton stepped by her and jerked the covering aside. Startled, puzzled by what she saw, she looked to him wonderingly. Placed neatly, lying side by side, their metal surfaces winking back at the light of Norton's match, were a number of rifles. A score of them, fifty perhaps.

"It looks like the beginning of a young revolution!" she cried, her gaze held, her eyes fascinated by the unexpected.

"You've seen about everything now," he told her, the red ember of a burned-out match dropping to the floor. "Those boxes contain cartridges. Now let's go back to Brocky."

"But they'll see that you have been here."

"I'll come back in a minute with the lantern; I want a further chance to look things over. Then I'll put the blanket back and see that not even that charred match gives us away. And we'd better be eating and get started."

With a steaming tin of black coffee at her side on the rock floor, a brown piece of bacon between her fingers, she forgot to eat or drink while she listened to Norton's story. At the beginning it seemed incredible; then, her thoughts sweeping back over the experiences of these last twenty-four hours, her eyes having before them the picture of a sheriff, grim-faced and determined, a wounded man lying just beyond the fire from her, the rough rudely-arched walls and ceiling of a cave-man's dwelling about her, she deemed that what Norton knew and suspected was but the thing to be expected.

"Jim Galloway is a big man," the sheriff said thoughtfully. "A very big man in his way. My father was after him for a long time; I have been after him ever since my father's death. But it is only recently that I have come to appreciate Jim Galloway's caliber. That's why I could never get him with the goods on; I have been looking for him in the wrong places.

"I estimated that he was making money with the Casa Blanca and a similar house which he operates in Pozo; I thought that his entire game lay in such layouts and a bit of business now and then like the robbing of the Las Palmas man. And now I know that most of these lesser jobs are not even Galloway's affair, that he lets some of his crowd like the Kid or Antone or Moraga put them across and keep the spoils, often enough.

"In a word, while I've been looking for Jim Galloway in the brush he has been doing his stunt in the big timber! And now—" the look in Norton's eyes suggested that he had forgotten the girl to whom he was talking; his hand on his knee had shut into a hard, tense fist—"and now I have picked up his trail!"

"And that's something," interposed Brocky Lane, a flash of fire in his eyes. "Considering that no man ever knew better than Jim Galloway how to cover tracks."

"YOU SEE," continued Norton, "Jim Galloway's bigness consists very largely of these two things: he knows how to keep his hands off of the little jobs and he knows how to hold men to him. Bisbee of Las Palmas goes down in the Casa Blanca; his money, perhaps a thousand dollars, finds its way into the pockets of Kid Rickard, Antone and maybe another two or three men. Jim Galloway sees what goes on and does no petty haggling over the spoils; he gets a strangle-hold on the men who do the job; it costs him nothing but another lie or so and he has them where he can count on them later on when he needs such men.

"Further, if they are arrested; Jim Galloway and Galloway's money come to the front; they are defended in court by the best legal talent to be had, men are bribed and they go free. As a result of such labors on Galloway's part I'd say at a rough guess that there are from a dozen to fifty men in the county right now who are his men, body and soul.

"With a gang like that at his back a man

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of Galloway's type has grown pretty strong. Strong enough to plan—yes, and by the Lord, carry out—the kind of game he's playing right now.

"A half-breed took sick and died a short time ago, a man whom I'd never set my eyes on particularly. It happened that he was a superstitious devil and that he was a second or third cousin and a friend of Ignacio Chavez. He was quite positive that unless the bells rang properly for him he would go to hell the shortest way. So he sent for Ignacio and wound up by talking a good deal. Ignacio passed the word on to me. And that was the first inkling I had of Galloway's real game. In a word, this is what it is:

"He plans on one big stroke and then a long rest and quiet enjoyment of the proceeds. You have seen the rifles; he'll arm a crowd of his best men—or his worst, as you please—swoop down on San Juan, rob the bank there, shooting down just as many men as happen to be in the way, rush in automobiles to Pozo and Kepple's Town, stick up the banks there, levy on the Las Palmas mines, and then steer straight to the border. And, if all worked according to schedule, the papers across the country would record the most daring raid across the border yet, blaming the whole affair on a detachment of gringo-hating Mexican bandits and revolutionists."

Virginia stared at him, half-incredulously. But the look in Norton's eyes, the same look in Brocky Lane's, assured her.

"Why do you wait then?" she asked sharply. "If you know all this why don't you arrest the man and his accomplices now? Before it is too late?"

"And have the whole country laugh at me? Where's my evidence? Just the word of a dead Indian, repeated by another Indian, that and a few rifles hid in the mountains? Even if we proved the rifles were Galloway's, and I don't believe we could prove it now, how would we set about proving his intention? No; I've talked it all over with the district attorney and we can't move yet. We've got our chance at last; the chance to watch and get Jim Galloway with the goods on. But we've got to wait until he is just ready to strike. And then we are going to put a stop to lawlessness in San Juan once and for all."

"But," she objected breathlessly, "if he should strike before you are ready?"

"It is our one business in life that he doesn't do it. We know what he is up to; we have found this hiding-place; we shall keep an eye on it night and day, every second of the time from now on. He doesn't know that we have been here; no one knows but ourselves. You see now, Miss Page why I couldn't bring Patten here? Patten talks too much and Galloway knows every thought in Patten's mind. And you see now why I have told you what I have, and how important it is for you to forget that you have been here?"

For a little she sat silent, staring into the embers of the dying fire.

"The thing which I can't understand," she said presently, "is that if Jim Galloway is the 'big man' that you say he is he should do as much talking as he must have done; that he should have told his plans to such a man as the Indian who told them to Ignacio Chavez."

"But he didn't tell all of this," Norton informed her. "The Indian died without guessing what I have told you. He merely knew that the rifles were here because Galloway had employed him to bring them and because he was the man who told Galloway of this hiding-place. He believed that the only thing Galloway planned was to get a lot of arms and ammunition hidden out here in the mountains, then after a while, to smuggle them south and across the border, selling to the Mexicans. But from what little he could tell Chavez and from what we found out for ourselves, the whole play became pretty obvious.

"No, Galloway hasn't been talking and he has been playing as safe as a man can upon such business as this. His luck was against him, that's all, when the Indian died and insisted on being rung out by the San Juan bells. There's always that little element of chance in any business, legitimate or otherwise. And now, if you'll finish your breakfast I'll show you a view you'll never forget and then we'll hit the trail."

"But Mr. Lane?" she asked. "You don't intend to leave him here all alone? He will get well with the proper attention; but he must have that."

"Within another hour or so," Norton told her, "Tom Cutter will be back here with one of Brocky's cowboys with him. They'll move Lane from here into a cañon on the other side of the mountain. Oh, I

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know he oughtn't to be moved, but what else can we do? Besides, Brocky insists on it. Then they'll arrange to take care of him; if necessary you'll come out again tomorrow night?"

"Of course," she said simply. And, having finished her bacon and coffee, she went to where Brocky lay and held out her hand to him. "I understand now, I think, why you would refuse to die, no matter how badly you were hurt, until you had helped Mr. Norton finish the thing you have set your hands to. It's an honor, Mr. Lane, to have a patient like you."

Whereupon Brocky Lane grew promptly crimson and tongue-tied.

"And now the view, Mr. Norton, and I am ready to go."

As he led the way she went with him to the outer ledge from which last night they had entered the cave.

"In daylight you can see half-'round the world from here," he said as they stood with their backs to the rock. "Now you can get an idea of what it's like."

Below her was the chasm formed by these cliffs standing sheer and fronting other tall cliffs looming blackly, the stars beginning to fade in the sky above them. Norton pushed a stone outward with his boot; she heard it strike, rebound, strike again—and then there was silence; when the falling stone reached the bottom no sound came back to tell her how far it had fallen.

Turning a little to the right, looking southward, she saw the cliffs standing further and further back on each side so that the eye might travel between them and out over the lower slopes and the distant stretches of level land which, more now than ever, seemed a great limitless sea. The stars were paling rapidly; the first glint of the new day was in the air, the world lay shadowy and silent and lifeless, softened in the seeming but as in the daytime slumbrous under an atmosphere of brooding mystery.

"When you told me last night—when you put your rope around me and said that I might fall half a dozen feet——"

"Had we fallen it would have been a hundred feet, many a time," he said quietly. "But I knew we wouldn't fall. And," looking into her face with an expression in his eyes which the shadows hid, "I shouldn't have sought to minimize the danger to you had I known you as well as I think I know you now. I don't believe I ever knew another girl like you, Virginia Page."

"Thank you," she said lightly. But she was conscious of a warm pleasurable glow throughout her entire being. It was good to live life in the open, it was good to stand upon the cliff-tops with a man like Roderick Norton, it was good to have such a man speak thus.

Five minutes later they were making their way down the cliffs toward the horses.

CHAPTER IX

HERE and there throughout the great stretches of the sun-smitten southwest are spots which still remain practically unknown, wherein men come seldom or not at all, where no man cares to tarry. Barren mountains that are burning, blistering hot, sucked dry long ago of their last vestige of moisture; endless drifts of sand where the silent animal-life is scanty, where fanged cactus and stubborn mesquite fight their eternal battles for life; mesas and lomas little known, shunned by humanity.

True, men have been here, some few poking into the dust of ancient ruins, more seeking minerals, and now and then one, with the brand of Cain upon his brow, evading the law, to be followed relentlessly by such as Roderick Norton. And yet there is the evidence, if one looks, that this desolate, shunned land once had its teeming tribes and its green fields.

Virginia and Roderick, having made their hazardous way down the cliffs and to their horses in silence, found their tongues loosened as they rode westward in the soft dawn; Virginia asked her questions and he, as best he could, answered them. She asked eagerly of the old cliff-dwellers and he shrugged his shoulders. Aztecs, were they? Toltecs? What? *Quien sabe?* They were a people of mystery who had left behind them a silence like that of the desert wastes themselves. Whence they came, where they went and why must long remain questions with many answers and therefore none at all. But he could tell her a few things of the ancient civilization—and a civilization it truly was—and of the signs left for posterity to puzzle over.

They had builded cities, and the ruins of their pueblos still stand scattered across the weary, scorched land; they constructed mile

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after mile of aqueducts whose lines are followed to-day by reclamation engineers; they irrigated and cultivated their lands; they made adobes high up on the mountains, dwelling in caves, enlarging their dwellings, shaping homes and fortresses and lookouts. And just so long as the mountains themselves last, will men come now and then into such places as that wherein Jim Galloway's rifles lay hidden.

"I have lived in this part of the world all but two or three years of my life," said Norton at the end, "and yet I never heard of these particular caves until a very few days ago. I don't believe that there are ten people living who know of them; so Galloway, hiding his stuff out there was playing just as safe as a man can play. When he plays the game crooked, anyway."

"But won't he guess something? When he misses Moraga?"

"I don't think so." Norton shook his head. "Tom Cutter and Brocky made Moraga talk. He was to keep an eye on this end but he was commissioned also to make a trip over to the county line. The first thing Jim Galloway will hear will be that Moraga got drunk and into a scrape and was taken in by Sheriff Roberts. Then I think that Galloway will slip out of San Juan himself some dark night and climb the cliffs to make sure. When he finds everything absolutely as it was left, when time passes and nothing is done, I think he will replace Moraga with another man and figure that everything is all right. Why shouldn't he?"

From Galloway and Moraga they got back to a discussion of the ancient peoples of the desert, venturing surmise for surmise, finding that their stimulated fancies winged together, daring to construct for themselves something of the forgotten annals of a forgotten folk, who, perhaps, were living in walled cities while old Egypt was building her pyramids. Then, abruptly, in a patch of tall mesquite, Norton reined in his horse and stopped.

"You understand why I must leave you here," he said. "Yonder, beyond those trees straight ahead—you will see it from that little ridge—is Las Estrellas, a town of a dozen houses. But before you get there you will come to the house where old Ramorez, a half-breed, lives. You remember; if you are missed in San Juan Struve will say that you have gone to see Ramorez. He is actually sick by the way; maybe you can do something for him. His shack is in those cottonwoods, this side of Las Estrellas. You'll find Ignacio there, too; he'll go back to San Juan with you. And, once again, thank you."

He put out his hand; she gave him hers and for a moment they sat looking at each other gravely. Then Norton smiled, the pleasant boyish smile, her lips curved at him deliciously, he touched his hat and was gone. And she, riding slowly, turned Persis toward Las Estrellas.

FROM Las Estrellas, an unkempt, ugly village, strangely named, it was necessary to ride some fifteen miles through sand and scrub before coming again into San Juan. Virginia Page, sincerely glad that she had made her call upon old Ramorez who was suffering painfully from acute stomach trouble and whose distress she could partially alleviate, made the return ride in the company of Ignacio. But first, from Ramorez' s baking hovel, the Indian conducted her to another where a young woman with a baby a week old needed her.

So it was well on in the afternoon and with a securely established alibi that she rode by the old mission and to the hotel. As Ignacio rode listlessly away with the horses, as innocent-looking a lazy beggar as the world ever knew, Virginia caught a glimpse of a white skirt and cool sunshade coming up the street.

"Florence Engle," she thought. "Who, no doubt, will cut me dead if I give her the opportunity."

And a little hurriedly she turned in at the hotel door and went to her room. She had removed hat and gauntlets and was preparing for a bath and change of clothing when a light knock sounded on her door. The rap, preceded by quick little steps down the hall, was essentially feminine.

"Hello, Cousin Virginia," said Florence. "May I come in?"

Virginia brought her in, gave her a chair and regarded her curiously. The girl's face was flushed and pink, her eyes were bright and quite gay and untroubled, her whole air genuinely friendly. Last night Virginia had judged her to be about seventeen; now she looked a mere child.

"I was perfectly nasty last night, wasn't I?" Florrie remarked as she stood her sunshade by her chair and smiled engagingly.

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"Oh, I know it. Just a horrid little cat—but then I'm that most of the time. I came all this way and in all this dust and heat just to ask you to forgive me. Will you?"

For the moment Virginia was nonplussed. But Florence only laughed, clasped her hands somewhat affectedly and ran on, her words tumbling out in helter-skelter fashion.

"Oh, I know. I'm spoiled and I'm selfish and I'm mean, I suppose. And, oh dear, I'm as jealous as anything. But I'm ashamed of myself this time. Whew! you ought to have listened in on the party after you left! If you could have heard mama scold me and papa jaw me about the way I acted it would have made you almost sorry for me."

"But you weren't horrid at all," Virginia broke in at last, her heart suddenly warming to this very obviously spoiled, futile but none the less likable Florrie. "You mustn't talk that way. And if your parents made you come——"

"They didn't," said Florrie calmly. "They couldn't. Nobody ever made me do anything; that's what's the matter with me. I came because I wanted to. As the men say, I wanted to square myself. And, would you believe it, this is the third time I have called. Mr. Struve kept telling me that you had gone to see Old Joe Ramorez—isn't he the awfullest old pirate you ever saw? And the dirtiest? I don't see how you can go near a man like that, even if he is dying; honestly I don't. But you must do all kinds of things, being a doctor."

Her clasped hands tightened, she put her head of fluffy hair to one side and looked at Virginia with such frank wonder in her eyes that Virginia colored under them.

"And," ran on Florrie, forestalling a possible interruption, "I was ready to poke fun at you last night just for being something capable and—and splendid. There was my jealousy again, I suppose. You ought to have heard papa on that score: 'Look here, my fine miss: if you could just be something worth while in the world, if you could do as much good in all of your silly life as Virginia Page does every day of hers—and so forth until he was ready to burst and mama was ready to cry and I was ready to bite him!"

And she trilled off in a burst of laughter which was eloquent of the fact that Florence Engle, be her faults what they might, was not the one to hold a grudge.

"I am sorry," said Virginia, smiling a little, "if on my account——"

"You were just going to get cleaned up, weren't you?" asked Florrie, contritely. "You look as hot and dusty as anything. My, what pretty hair you have; I'll bet it comes down to your waist, doesn't it? You ought to see mine when I take it down; it's like the pictures of the bushwhackers—you know what I mean, from South Africa or somewhere, you know—only of course mine's a prettier color.

"Some time I'll come and comb it for you, when you're tired out from curing sick Indians. But now," and she jumped to her feet, "I'll go out on the porch while you get dressed and then you come out, will you? It's cool there under the awning and I'll have Mr. Struve bring us out some cold lemonade. But first you do forgive me, don't you?"

Virginia's prompt assurance was incomplete when Florrie flitted out, banging the door after her, headed toward the lounging chairs on the veranda.

"You pretty thing!" exclaimed Miss Florrie as Virginia joined her as coolly and femininely dressed if not quite as fluffily as the banker's daughter. "Oh, but you are; quite the most stunning creature that ever came into San Juan. Oh, I know all about myself; don't you suppose I've stood in front of a glass by the long hours—wishing it was a wishing-glass all the time and that I could turn a pug nose into a Grecian. I'm pretty; you're simply beautiful."

"Look here, my dear," laughed Virginia, taking the chair which Florrie had drawn close up to her own in the shade against the adobe wall, "you have already made amends. It isn't necessary to——"

"I haven't half-finished," cried Florrie, emphatically. "You see it's a way of mine to do things just by halves and quit there. But today it is different; today I am going to square myself. That's one reason why I treated you so cattishly last night; because you were so maddeningly good to look upon. Through a man's eyes, you know; and that's about all that counts anyway, isn't it? And the other reason was that you came in with Roddy and he looked so contented. Do you wonder that I am just wild about him? Isn't he a perfect dear?"

Florrie's utter frankness disconcerted Virginia. The confession of "wildness" about San Juan's sheriff, followed by the asseveration

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of his perfect dearness was made in bright frankness, Florrie's voice lowered no whit though Julius Struve at the moment was coming down the veranda bearing a tray and glasses. Virginia was not without gratitude that Struve lingered a moment and bantered with Florrie; when he departed she sought to switch the talk in another direction. But Florrie, sipping from her tall glass and setting it aside, was before her.

"You see it was double-barreled jealousy; so I did rather well not to fly at you and tear your eyes out, didn't I? Just because you and he came in together—as if every time a man and girl walk down the street together it means that they are going to get married! But you see, Roddy and I have known each other ever since before I can remember, and I have asked myself a million times if some day we are going to be Mr. and Mrs. Roderick Norton—and there are times when I think we are!"

"You have a long time ahead of you yet, haven't you, Florence, before you have to answer a question like that?" asked Virginia amusedly.

"Because I am so young?" cried Florrie. "Oh, I don't know; girls marry young here. Now there is Tita—she is our cook's sister—she has two babies already and she is only four months older than I am. And—look, Virgie; there is the most terrible creature in the world. It is Kid Rickard; he killed the Las Palmas man, you know. I am not going even to look at him; I hate him worse than Caleb Patten—and that's like saying I hate strychnine worse than arsenic, isn't it?

"But who in the name of all that is wonderful is the man with him? Isn't he the handsome thing? I never saw him before. He is from the outside, Virgie; you can tell by the fashionable cut of his clothes and by the way he walks and—isn't he distinguished!"

"It is Elmer!" exclaimed Virginia, staring half-incredulously at the two figures which were slowly approaching from the southern end of the street. "When did he get here? I didn't expect him——"

THEN she chose to forget all save the essential fact that her "baby brother" was here and ran out to the sidewalk, calling to him.

"Hello, sis," returned Elmer nonchalantly.

He was a pale, thin, anemic-looking young fellow a couple of years younger than Virginia who affected a swagger and gloves and who had a cough which was insistent but which he strove to disguise. And yet Florrie's hyperbole had not been entirely without warrant. He had something of Virginia's fine profile, a look of her in his eyes, the stamp of good blood upon him. He suffered his sister to kiss him, meantime turning his eyes with a faint sign of interest to the fair girl on the veranda. Florrie smiled.

"Sis," said Elmer, "this is Mr. Rickard. Mr. Rickard, shake hands with my sister, Miss Page."

A feeling of pure loathing swept over the girl as she turned to look into Kid Rickard's sullen eyes and degenerate, cruel face. But, since the Kid was a couple of paces removed and was slow about coming forward, not so much as raising his hand to his wide hat, she nodded at him and managed to say a quiet, noncommittal, "How do you do?" Then she slipped her arm through Elmer's.

"Come, Elmer," she said, hastily. "I want you to know Miss Florence Engle; she is a sort of cousin of ours."

"Sure," said Elmer off-handedly. "Come on, Rickard."

But the Kid, standing upon no ceremony had drawn his hat a trifle lower over his eyes and turned his shoulder upon them, continuing along the street in his slouching walk. Elmer, summoning youth's supreme weapon of an affected boredom, yawned, stifled his little cough and went with Virginia to meet Florence.

Florence giggled over the introduction, then grew abruptly as grave as a matron of seventy and tactlessly observed that Mr. Page had a very bad cold; how could one have a cold in weather like this? Whereupon Mr. Page glared at her belligerently, noted that she had her hair down in curls, revised his first opinion of her, set her down not only as a cousin but as a crazy kid besides and removed half a dozen steps to a chair.

"I don't think much of your friends," remarked Florrie, sensing sudden opposition and flying half-way to meet it.

Elmer Page produced a very new, unsullied pipe from his pocket and filled it with an air while Virginia looked on curiously. Having done so and having drawn up one trouser's leg to save the crease, he

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crossed the leg and at last putting the pipe-stem into his mouth, he regarded Florrie from the cool and serene height of his superior age.

"If you refer to Mr. Rickard," he said aloofly, "I may say that he is not a friend —yet. I just met him this afternoon. But, although he hasn't had the social advantages, perhaps, still he is a man of parts."

Florrie sniffed and tossed her head. Virginia bit her lips and watched them.

"Been smoking too many cigs, I guess, sis," Elmer remarked apropos of the initial observation of Miss Engle which still rankled. "Got a regular cigaret fiend's cough. Gave 'em up. Hitting the pipe now."

"If you knew," said Florrie spitefully, "that Mr. Rickard as you call him has just murdered a man yesterday, what would you say then, I wonder?"

There was a sparkle of excitement in Elmer's eyes as he swung about to answer.

"Murdered!" he challenged. "You've heard just one side of it, of course. Bisbee got drunk and insulted Mr. Rickard. They call him the Kid, you know. Say, sis, he's had a life for you! Full of adventure, all kinds of sport. And Bisbee shot first, too. But the Kid got him!" he concluded triumphantly. "Galloway told me all about it—and what a blundering rummy the fool sheriff is."

"Galloway?" queried Virginia, uneasily. "You know him, too, already?"

"Sure," replied Elmer. "He's a good sort, too. You'll like him. I asked him around."

"For goodness' sake, Elmer, when did you get to San Juan? Have you been here a week or just a few hours?"

"Got in on the stage at noon, of course. But it doesn't take a man all year to get acquainted in a town this size."

"A man!" giggled Florrie.

"I can see," laughed Virginia, "that you two are going to be more kin than kind to each other; you'll be quarreling in another moment."

Florrie looked delighted at the prospect; Elmer yawned and brooded over his pipe. But out of the tail of his eye he took stock again of her blonde prettiness, and she, ready from the beginning to make fun of him repeated to herself the words she had used to Virginia:

"He is handsome—and distinguished-looking!"

CHAPTER X

DESPITE the physical monotony which became a factor in her life Virginia Page found time passing swiftly in San Juan. Within two weeks she came almost to forget how she had heard a rattle of pistol shots, how the slow sobbing of a bell in the mission garden had bemoaned a life gone and a fresh crime upon a man's soul; at the end of a month it seemed to her that she had dreamed that ride through the night with Roderick Norton, the climbing the cliffs, the ministering to a stricken man lying in the forsaken abode of ancient cliff-dwellers.

She was like one marooned upon a tiny island in an immense sea who has experienced the crisis of shipwreck and now finds existence suddenly resolved into a quiet struggle for the maintenance of life—that and a placid expectation. As another might have waited through the long, quiet hours for the sign of a white sail or a black plume of smoke, so did she wait for the end of a tale whose beginning had included her.

That the long days did not drag was due not so much to that which happened about her but to that which occurred within her. She carried responsibility upon each shoulder; her life was in the shaping and she and none other must make it what it would be; her brother's character was at that unstable stage when it was ready to run into the mold. She had brought him here, from the city to the rim of the desert, the step had been her doing, nobody's but hers. And she had come here far less for the sake of Elmer Page's cough than for the sake of his manhood. She wanted him to grow to be a man one could be proud of; there were times when his eyes evaded her and she feared the outcome.

"He is just a boy," she told herself, seeking courage. It seemed such a brief time ago that she had dressed him and washed his face. She made excuses for him but did not close her eyes to the truth. The good old saw that boys will be boys failed to make of Elmer all that she would have him.

Further to this consideration was another matter which filled the hours for her. The few dollars with which she had established herself in San Juan marched in steady procession out of her purse and fewer

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other dollars came to take their places. The Indian Ramorez whose stomach-trouble she had mitigated came full of gratitude and Casa Blanca whisky and paid La Señorita Doctor as handsomely as he could; he gave her his unlimited and eternal thanks and a very beautiful hair rope. Neither helped her very greatly to pay for room and board.

Another Indian offered her a pair of chickens; a third paid her seventy-five cents on account and promised the rest soon. When she came to know his type better she realized that he had done rather exceptionally well by her.

She went often to the Engles', growing to love all three of them, each in a different way. Florrie she found vain, spoiled, selfish, but all in so frank a fashion that in return for an admittedly half-jealous admiration she gave a genuine affection. And she was glad to see how Elmer made friends with them, always appearing at his best in their home. He and Florrie were already as intimate as though they had grown up with a back-yard fence separating their two homes; they criticised each other with terrible outspokenness, they made fun of each other, they very frequently "hated and despised" each other and, utterly unknown to either Florrie Engle or Elmer Page, were the best of friends.

Of Roderick Norton San Juan saw little through these weeks. He came now and then, twice ate with Virginia and Elmer at Struve's, talked seriously with John Engle, teased Florrie and went away upon the business which called him elsewhere. Upon one of these visits he told Virginia that Brocky Lane was "on the mend" and would be as good as new in a month; no other reference was made to her ride with him.

But through his rides into San Juan, brief and few though they were, Roderick Norton was enabled to assure himself with his own eyes that Kid Rickard was still to be found here if required, that Antone as usual was behind the Casa Blanca bar, that Jim Galloway was biding his time with no outward show of growing restless or impatient. Tom Cutter, Norton's San Juan deputy, was a man to keep both eyes open and yet there were times when the sheriff was not content with another man's vision.

Nor did the other towns of the county, scattered widely across the desert, beyond the mountains and throughout the little valleys see much more of him. If a man wished word with Rod Norton these days his best hope of finding him lay in going out to *el Rancho de las Flores*.

It was Norton's ranch, having been Billy Norton's before him, one of the choice spots of the county bordering Las Cruces Rancho where Brocky Lane was manager and foreman. Beyond the San Juan Mountains it lay across the head of one of the most fertile of the neighboring valleys, the Big Water Creek giving it its greenness, its value and the basis for its name. Here for days at a time the sheriff could in part lay aside the cares of his office, take the reins out of his hired foreman's hands, ride among his cattle and horses and dream such dreams as came to him.

"One of these days I'll get you, Jim Galloway," he had grown into the habit of musing. "Then they can get another sheriff and I can do what I want to do."

And his desire had grown very clearly defined to him; it was the old longing of a man who comes into a wilderness such as this, the longing to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before his coming. With his water-rights a man might work modern magic; far back in the hills he had found the natural site for his storage dams; slightly lower in a nest of hills there would be some day a pigmy lake whose seductive beauty to him who dwells on desert lands calls like the soft beauty of a woman; upon a knoll where now was nothing there would come to be a comfortable, roomy, hospitable ranch-house to displace forever the shacks which housed the men now further down the slopes; and everywhere, because there was water aplenty, would there be roses and grape vines and orange trees. All this—when he should get Jim Galloway.

From almost any knoll upon the Rancho de las Flores he could see the crests of Mt. Temple lifted in clear-cut lines against the sky. If he rode with Gaucho, his foreman, among the yearlings, he saw Mt. Temple; if he rode the fifty miles to San Juan he saw the same peaks from the other side. And a hundred times he looked up at them with eyes which were at once impatient and stern; he began to grow angry with Galloway for so long postponing the final issue.

For, though he did not go near the cliff caves, he knew that the rifles still lay there awaiting Jim Galloway's readiness. A man named "Bucky" Walsh was prospecting

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for gold upon the slopes of Mt. Temple, a silent, leather-faced little fellow, quick-eyed and resourceful. And, above the discovery of color, it was the supreme business of Bucky Walsh to know what happened upon the cliffs above him. If there were anything to report no man knew better than he how to get out of a horse all there was of speed in the animal.

In the end Norton called upon the reserves of his patience, saying to himself that if Jim Galloway could bide his time in calmness he could do the same. The easier since he was unshaken in his confidence that the time was coming when he and Galloway would stand face to face while guns talked. For never once did he let himself hope for another ending.

GIVING what time he had free to ranch matters at Las Flores, the sheriff found other things to occupy him. There was a gamblers' fight one night at the camp at Las Palmas mines, a man badly hurt, an ill-starred bystander dead, the careless gun-man a fugitive, headed for the border. Norton went out after him, shifted saddle from jaded beast to fresh again and again, rode two hundred miles with only the short stops for hastily taken food and water and got his man willy-nilly a mile below the border. What was more, he made it his personal business that the man was convicted and sentenced to a long term; about San Juan there was no crime less tolerable than that of "shooting wild."

But all this brought him no closer to Jim Galloway; Galloway, meeting him shortly afterward in San Juan, laughed and thanked him for the job. It appeared that the man whom Norton had brought back to stand trial was not only no friend of the proprietor of the Casa Blanca but an outspoken enemy.

"You'll be asking favors of me next, Norton," grinned the big, thick-bodied man. "I'd pay you real money for getting a few like him out of my way. Get me, don't you?" and he passed on, his eyes turned tauntingly.

Yes, Norton "got" him. No man in the Southwest harbored more bitter ill-will for the lawless than Jim Galloway—unless the lawless stood in with him. Aforetime many a hardy, tempestuous spirit had defied the crime-dictator; here of late they were few who hoped to slit throats or cut purses and not pay allegiance to the saloon-keeper of San Juan.

Upon the heels of this affair, however, came another which was destined to bring Roderick Norton to a crisis in his life. Word reached him at Las Flores that a lone prospector in the Red Hills had been robbed of a baking-powder tin of dust and that the prospector, recovering from the blows which had been rained on his head, had identified one of his two assailants. That one was Vidal Nunez; circumstances hinted that the other well might be Kid Rickard.

Norton promptly set Tom Cutter to find out what he could of Rickard's movements upon the day of the robbery and himself set out to bring in Vidal Nunez, taking a grim joy in his task when he remembered how Nunez had been the man who, with a glance, had cautioned Antone to hold his tongue after the shooting of Bisbee at the Casa Blanca.

"Here's a man Jim Galloway won't thank me for rounding up," he told himself. "And we are going to see if his arm is long enough to keep Nunez out of the penitentiary."

He went to San Juan, learned that nothing had been seen of the Mexican there, set the machinery of the man-hunt in full swing, doubled back through the settlements to the eastward and for two weeks got nothing but disappointment for his efforts. Nunez had disappeared and none who cared to tell knew where. But Norton kept on doggedly; confident that the man had not had the opportunity to get out of the country he was equally confident that, soon or late, he would get him. Then came the second meeting with Jim Galloway.

The two men rode into each other's view on the lonely trail half-way between San Juan and Tecolote, which is to say where the little, barren hills break the monotony of the desert lands some eight or ten miles to the westward of San Juan. It was late afternoon and Galloway, riding back toward town, had the sun in his eyes so that he could not have known as soon as did Norton whom he was encountering. But Galloway was not the man to ride anywhere that he was not ready for whatever man he might meet; Norton's eyes, as the two drew nearer on the blistering trail, marked the way Galloway's right hand rested loosely on the cantle of his saddle and very near Galloway's right hip.

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Norton, merely eying him sharply, was for passing on without a word or a nod. The other, however, jerked in his horse, clearly of a mind for parley.

"Well?" demanded Norton.

"I was just thinking," said Galloway dryly, "what an exceptionally fitting spot we've picked! If I got you or you got me right now nobody in the world need ever know who did the trick. We couldn't have found a much likelier place if we'd sailed away to an island in the South Seas."

"I was thinking something of the same kind," returned Norton coolly. "Have you any curiosity in the matter? If you think you can beat me to it—why, then, go to it!"

Galloway eased himself in the saddle.

"If I thought I could beat you to it," he answered tonelessly, "I'd do it. As you know. If I even thought that I'd have an even break with you," he added, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully as they took stock of the sheriff's right hand swinging free at his side and never far from the butt of the revolver fitting loosely in his holster, "I'd take the chance. No, you're a shade too lively on the draw for me and I happen to know it."

For a little the two men sat staring into each other's eyes, the distance of ten steps between them, their right hands idle while their left hands upon twitching reins curbed the impatience of two mettled horses. As was usual their regard was one of equal malevolence, of brimming, cold hatred. But slowly a new look came into Norton's eyes, a probing, penetrating look of calculation. Galloway was again opening his lips when the sheriff spoke, saying with contemptuous lightness:

"Jim Galloway, you and I have bucked each other for a long time. I guess it's in the cards that one of us will get the other some day. Why not right now and end the whole —— thing? When I'm up against a man as I am against you I like to make it my business to know just how much sand has filtered into his make-up. You'd kill me if you had the chance and weren't afraid to do it, wouldn't you?"

"If I had the chance," returned Galloway as coolly, though a spot of color showed under the thick tan of his cheek. "And I'll get it some day."

"If you've got the sand," said Norton, "you don't have to wait!".

"What do you mean?" snapped Galloway sharply.

Norton's answer lay in a gesture. Always keeping such a rein on his horse that he faced Galloway and kept him at his right, he lifted the hand which had been hanging close to his gun. Slowly, inch by inch, his eyes hard and watchful upon Galloway's eyes, he raised his hand. Understanding leaped into Galloway's prominent eyes; it seemed that he had stopped breathing; surely the fingers upon the cantle of his saddle had separated a little, his hand growing to resemble a tarantula preparing for its brief spring.

STEADILY, slowly, the sheriff's hand rose in the air, brought upward and outward in an arc as his arm was held stiff, as high as his shoulder now, now at last lifted high above his head. And all of the time his eyes rested bright and hard and watchful upon Jim Galloway's, filled at once with challenge and recklessness—and certainty of himself.

Galloway's right hand had stirred the slightest fraction of an inch, his fingers were rigid and still stood apart. As he sat, twisted about in his saddle, his hand had about seven inches to travel to find the gun in his hip-pocket. Since, when they first met, he had thrown his big body to one side, his left boot loose in its stirrup while his weight rested upon his right leg, his gun-pocket was clear of the saddle, to be reached in a flash.

"You'll never get another chance like this, Galloway," said Norton crisply. "I'd say, at a guess, that my hand has about eight times as far to travel as yours. You wanted an even break; you've got more than that. But you'll never get more than one shot. Now, it's up to you."

"Before we start anything," began Galloway.

But Norton cut him short.

"I am not fool enough to hold my hand up like this until the blood runs out of my fingers. You've got your chance; take it or leave it, but don't ask for half an hour's option on it!"

Swift changing lights were in Galloway's eyes. But his thoughts were not to be read. That he was tempted by his opportunity was clear; that he understood the full sense underlying the words, "You'll never get more than one shot," was equally obvious.

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That shot, if it were not to be his last act in this world, must be the accurate result of one lightning gesture; his hand must find his gun, close about the grip, draw and fire with the one absolutely certain movement. For the look in Rod Norton's eyes was for any man to read.

Jim Galloway was not a coward and Rod Norton knew it. He was essentially a gambler whose business in life was to take chances. But he was of that type of gambler who plays not for the love of the game but to win; who sets a cool brain to study each hand before he lays his bet; who gages the strength of that hand not alone upon its intrinsic value but upon a shrewd guess at the value of the cards out against it.

At that moment he wanted, more than he wanted anything else in the wide scope of his unleashed desires, to kill Rod Norton; he balanced that fact with the other fact that less than anything in the world did he want to be killed himself. The issue was clear-cut.

While a watch might have ticked ten times neither man moved. During that brief time Galloway's jaw muscles corded, his face went a little white with the strain put upon him. The restive horses, tossing their heads, making merry music with jingling bridle chains, might have galloped a moment ago from an old book of fairy-tales, each carrying a man bewitched, turned to stone.

"If you've got the sand!" Norton taunted him, his blood running hot with the fierce wish to have done with sidestepping and procrastination. "If you've got the sand, Jim Galloway!"

"It's better than an even break that I could get you," said Galloway at last. "And, at that, it's an even break or nearly so, that as you slipped out of the saddle you'd get me, too. You take the pot this time, Norton; I'm not betting."

And shifting his hand he laid it loosely upon the horn of his saddle. As he did so his chest inflated deeply to a long breath.

Norton's uplifted hand came down swiftly, his thumb catching in his belt. There was a contemptuous glitter in his eyes.

"After this," he said bluntly, "you'll always know and I'll always know that you are afraid. I make it a part of my business not to underestimate the man I go out to get; I think I have overestimated you."

For a moment Galloway seemed not to have heard as he stared away through the gray distances. When he brought his eyes back to meet Norton's they were speculative.

"Men like you and me ought to understand each other and not make any mistakes," he said, speaking slowly. "I have just begun to imagine lately that I have been doping you up wrong all the time. Now I've got two propositions to make you; you can take either or neither."

"It will probably be neither; what are they? I've got a day's ride ahead of me."

"Maybe you have; maybe you haven't. That depends on what you say to my proposition—you're looking for Vidal Nunez, they tell me?"

"And I'm going to get him; as much as anything for the sake of swatting the devil around the stump."

"Meaning me?" Galloway shrugged. "Well, here's my song and dance: this county isn't quite big enough; you drop your little job and clear out and leave me alone and I'll pay you ten thousand dollars now and another ten thousand in six months from now."

"Offer number one," said Norton, manifesting neither surprise nor interest even. "Twenty thousand dollars to pull my freight; well, Jim Galloway, you must have something on the line that pulls like a big fish. Now, let's have the other barrel."

"I have suggested that you clean out; the other suggestion is that, if you won't get out of my way, you get busy on your job. Vidal Nunez will be at the Casa Blanca tonight—I have sent word for him to come in and that I'd look out for him. Come get him. Which will you take, Rod Norton? Twenty thousand iron men or your chances at the Casa Blanca?"

It was Norton's turn to grow thoughtful. Galloway was rolling a cigaret. The sheriff reached for his own tobacco and papers. Only when he had set a match to the brown cylinder and drawn the first of the smoke did he answer.

"You've said it all now, have you?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Galloway. "It's up to you this time. What's the word?"

Norton laughed.

"When I decide what I am going to do I always do it," he said lightly. "And as a rule I don't do a lot of talking about it beforehand. I'll leave you to guess the answer, Galloway."

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Galloway shrugged and swung his horse back into the trail.

"So long," he said colorlessly.

"So long," Norton returned.

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS something after six o'clock when Jim Galloway rode into San Juan. Leaving his sweat-wet horse in his own stable at the rear of the Casa Blanca to be taken care of by an Indian boy he passed through the patio and into a little room whose door he unlocked with a key from his pocket. For ten minutes he sat before a typewriting-machine, one big forefinger slowly picking out the letters of a brief letter. The address, also typed, bore the name of a town below the border. Without signing his communication he sealed it into its envelope and, relocking the door as he went out, walked thoughtfully down the street to the post-office.

As he passed Struve's hotel he lifted his hat; upon the veranda at the cooler, shaded end, Virginia was entertaining Florence Engle. Florrie nodded brightly to Galloway, turning quickly to Virginia as the big man went on.

"Do you actually believe, Virginia dear," she whispered, "that that man is as wicked as they say he is? Did you watch him going by? Did you see the way he took off his hat? Did you ever know a man to smile quite as he does?"

"I don't believe," returned Virginia, "that I ever had him smile at me, Florrie."

"His eyes are not bad eyes, are they?" Florrie ran on. "Oh, I know what papa thinks and what Rod thinks about him; but I just don't believe it! How could a man be the sort they say he is and still be as pleasant and agreeable and downright good-looking as Mr. Galloway? Why," and she achieved a quick little shudder, "if I had done all the terrible deeds they accuse him of I'd go around looking as black as a cloud all the time, savage and glum and remembering every minute how wicked I was."

Virginia laughed, failing to picture Florrie grown murderous. But Florrie merely pursed her lips as her eyes followed Galloway down the street and in through the post-office door.

"I just ask you, Virginia Page," she said at last, sinking back into the wide arms of her chair with a sigh, "if a man with murder and all kinds of sin on his soul could make love prettily?"

Virginia started.

"You don't mean—" she began quickly.

Florrie laughed but the other girl noted wonderingly a fresher tint of color in her cool cheeks.

"Goosey!" Florrie tossed her head, drew her skirts down modestly over her white-stockinged ankles and laughed again. "He never held my hand and all that. But with his eyes—is there any law against a man saying nice things with his eyes? And if there is, how is a girl going to stop him?"

Virginia might have replied that here was a matter which depended very largely upon the girl herself; but instead, estimating that there was little serious love-making on Galloway's part to be apprehended and taking Florrie as lightly as Florrie took the rest of the world, she was merely further amused. And already she had learned to welcome amusement of any sort in San Juan town.

But again here was Galloway, stopping now in front of Struve's, drawing another quick, bright smile from the banker's daughter, accepting its invitation and coming into the little yard and down the veranda. Only when he fairly towered over the two girls did he push back the hat which already he had touched to them, standing with his hands on his hips, his heavy features bespeaking a deep inward serenity and quiet good-humor.

It would have required a blinder man than Jim Galloway not to have marked the cool dislike and distrust in Virginia's eyes. But, though he turned from them to the pink-and-white girl at her side he gave no sign of sensing that he was in any way unwelcome here.

He had greeted Virginia casually; she, observing him keenly, understood what Florrie had meant by a man's making love with his eyes. His look, directed downward into the face smiling up at him, was alive with what was obviously a very genuine admiration. While Florrie allowed her flattered soul to drink deep and thirstily of the wine of adulation Virginia, only half-understanding the writing in Galloway's eyes, shivered a little and leaning forward suddenly, put her hand on Florrie's arm; the gesture, quick and spontaneous, meant nothing to Florrie, nothing to Galloway and a very great deal to Virginia Page.

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For it was essentially protective; it served to emphasize in her own mind a fear which until now had been a mere formless mist, a fear for her frivolous little friend. Galloway's whole being was so expressive of conscious power, Florrie's of vascillating impulsiveness that it required no considerable burden laid upon the imagination to picture the girl coming if he called—if he called with the look in his eyes now, with the tone he knew how to put into his voice.

Social lines are none too clearly drawn in towns like San Juan; often enough they have long ago failed to exist. A John Engle, though six days of the seven he sat behind his desk in a bank, was only man, his daughter only the daughter of a mere man; a Jim Galloway, though he owned the Casa Blanca and upon occasion stood behind his own bar, might be a man and look with level eyes upon all other men, their wives and their daughters.

Here, with conditions what they always had been, there could stand but one barrier between Galloway and Florrie Engle, the barrier of character. And already the girl had cried: "His eyes are not bad eyes, are they?" A barrier is a silent command to pause; what is the spontaneous answer of a spoiled child to any command?

Galloway spoke lightly of this and that, managing in a dozen little ways to compliment Florrie who chattered with him with a gaiety which partook of excitement. In ten minutes he went his way drawing her musing eyes after him. Until he had reached his own door and turned in at the Casa Blanca the two girls on Struve's veranda were silent.

Florrie's thoughts were flitting hither and yon, bright-winged, inconsequential, fluttering about Jim Galloway, deserting him for Roderick Norton, darting off to Elmer Page, coming home to Florrie herself. As for Virginia she was conscious of a sort of dread upon her heart, oppressed with the stubbornly insistent thought that if Jim Galloway cared to amuse himself with Florrie he was strong and she was weak; if he called to her she would follow.

VIRGINIA was not the only one whom Galloway had set pondering; certain of his words spoken to the sheriff when the two faced each other on the Tecolote trail gave Norton food for thought. For the first time Jim Galloway had openly offered a bribe, one of no insignificant proportions, prefacing his offer with the remark: "I have just begun to imagine lately that I have doped you up wrong all the time." If Galloway had gone on to add, "Time was when I didn't believe I could buy you but I have changed my mind about that," his meaning could have been no plainer. Now he held out a bribe in one hand, a threat in the other, and Norton riding on to Tecolote mused long over them both.

In Tecolote, a straggling village of many dogs and swarthy, grimy-faced children, he tarried until well after dark, making his meal of coffee, *frijoles* and *carne con chili*, thereafter smoking a contemplative pipe. Abandoning the little lunch-room to the flies and silence he crossed the road to a saloon kept by Pete Nunez, the brother of the man whom it was Norton's present business to make answer for a crime committed.

Pete, a law-abiding citizen nowadays principally for the reason that he had lost a leg in his younger, gayer days, swept up his crutch and swung across the room from the table where he was sitting to the bar, saying a careless *"Que hay?"* by way of greeting.

"Hello, Pete," Norton returned quietly. "Haven't seen Vidal lately, have you?"

Besides Vidal's brother there were a half-dozen men in the room playing cards or merely idling in the yellow light of the kerosene lamp swung from the ceiling, men of the saloon-keeper's breed to the last man of them. Their eyes, the slumbrous, mystery-filled orbs of their kind, had lifted under their long lashes to regard the sheriff with seeming indifference. Pete shrugged.

"Me, I ain't seen Vidal for a mont'," he answered briefly. "I see Jim Galloway though. Galloway say," and Pete ran his towel idly back and forth along the bar, "Vidal come to la Casa Blanca tonight. I dunno," and again he shrugged.

Norton allowed himself the luxury of a mystifying smile as Pete Nunez lifted probing eyes to his face.

"Jim Galloway has been known to lie before now, like other men," was all of the information he gave to the questioning look. "And," his face suddenly as expressionless as Pete's own, "it wouldn't be a bad bet to look for Vidal in Tres Robles, would it? Eh, Pete?"

With that he went out, quite willing that

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Pete and his crowd should think what they pleased. Tres Robles lay twenty miles northeast of Tecolote and if Pete cared to send word to Galloway that the sheriff had ridden on that way, well and good.

Half-an-hour later, with the deeper dark of the night settling thick and sultry over the surface of the desert lands, he rode out of town following the Tres Robles trail. He knew that Pete had come to his door and was watching; he had the vague suspicion that it was quite possible that Vidal was watching, too, with eyes smoldering with hatred.

That was only a guess, not even for a man to hazard a bet upon. But the feeling that the fugitive was somewhere in Tecolote or in the mesquite thickets near about had been strong enough to send him travelling this way in the afternoon, would have been strong enough for him to have acted upon, searching through shack after shack, were it not that deep down in his heart he did not believe that Jim Galloway had lied. Here, while he came in at one door Vidal might slip out at another, safe among friends. But in the Casa Blanca Norton meant that matters should be different.

For an hour he rode toward the northeast. Then, turning out of the trail and reining his horse into the utter blackness offered by the narrow mouth of an arroyo, he sat still for a long time, listening, staring back through the night toward Tecolote. At last, confident that he had not been followed, he cut across the low-lying *lomas* marking the western horizon and in a swinging gallop rode straight back toward San Juan.

He had had ample time for the shaping of his simple plans long before catching the first winking glimpse of the lights of the Casa Blanca. He left his horse under the cottonwoods, hung his spurs over the horn of the saddle and went silently to the back of Struve's hotel. Certain that no one had seen him he half-circled the building, came to the window which he had counted upon finding open, slipped in, passed down the hall and to Struve's room. At his light tap Struve called "Come in," and turned toward him as the door opened. Norton closed it behind him and spoke guardedly:

"I am taking a chance that Vidal Nunez is at Galloway's right now," he told the hotel-keeper. "I am going to get him if he is. I want you to watch the back end of the Casa Blanca and see that he doesn't slip out that way. A shotgun is what you want—and blow the head off any man who doesn't stop when you tell him to. Is Tom Cutter in his room yet?"

While Struve, wasting neither time nor words, went to see, Norton unbuttoned his shirt, removed the thirty-eight caliber revolver from the holster slung under his left arm, whirled the cylinder and kept the gun in his left hand. In a moment Struve had returned, the deputy at his heels.

"What's this about Vidal bein' here?" Cutter asked sharply.

Norton explained briefly and as briefly gave Tom Cutter his orders. While Struve mounted guard at the rear Cutter was to look out for the front of the building.

"Goin' in alone, are you, Rod?" Cutter shook his head. "If Vidal is in there, an' Galloway an' the Kid an' Antone are all on the job, the chances are there's goin' to be somethin' happen. Better let me come in along with you, hadn't you?"

But Norton, his mouth grown set and grim and chary of words, shook his head. And followed by Struve and Cutter he was outside in the darkness again five minutes after he had entered the hotel.

Struve, a shotgun in his hands, took his place twenty steps from the back door of the Casa Blanca, his restless eyes sweeping back and forth continually, taking stock of door and window; a lamp burning in a rear room cast its light out through a window whose shade was less than half-drawn. Struve, growing accustomed to the light, made out the two forms silently going about the corner of the house.

Tom Cutter, accustomed to acting swiftly upon his superior's suggestions, listened wordlessly to the few whispered instructions, nodded and did as he was told, effacing himself in the shadows at the corner of the building, prepared when the time came to spring out into the street whence he could command the front and one side of the Casa Blanca. Norton, before leaving Cutter, had drawn the heavy gun from the holster swinging at his belt.

"It's some time since we've had any two-handed shooting to do, Tommy," he said as his lean fingers curved to the familiar grip of the Colt .45. "But I guess we haven't forgotten how. Now, stick tight until you hear things wake up."

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And he was gone, turning back to the rear of the house, passing close to Struve, going on to the northeast corner, slipping quietly about it, moving like a shadow along the eastern wall. Here were two windows, both looking into the long barroom, both with their shades drawn down tight.

AT THE first window Norton paused, listening. From within came a man's voice, the Kid's, in his ugly snarl of a laugh, evil and reckless and defiant, that and the clink of a bottle-neck against a glass. Norton, his body pressed against the wall, stood still, waiting for other voices, for Galloway's, for Vidal Nunez's. But after Kid Rickard's jarring mirth it was strangely still in the Casa Blanca; no sound of clicking chips bespeaking a poker game, no loud-voiced babble, no sound of a man walking across the bare floor.

"They're waiting, waiting for me to come," was Norton's quick thought. "Galloway knows I'm coming."

He passed on, came to the second window which was toward the front of the house, paused again. The brief, almost breathless silence within which had followed the Kid's laugh, had already been dissipated by the customary Casa Blanca sounds; a guitar was strumming, chips clicked, a bottle was set heavily upon the bar, a chair scraped. Norton frowned; something had just happened in there to still men's tongues. What was it? It was Galloway who gave him his answer.

"So you came, did you, Vidal?" There was a jeer in the heavy voice. "Scared to come, eh? And scared worse to stay away!" And Galloway's short laugh was as unpleasant as ever Rickard's had been.

"*Si;* I am here," the voice of Vidal Nunez was answering, quick, eager, sibilant with its unmistakable nervous excitement. "Pete tell me what you say an' I come." He lifted his voice abruptly, breaking into a soft Southern oath. "Like a cat, to jump through the little window an' roll on the floor an' by God, jus' in time. There is one man at the back with a gun an' one man in front an' another man——"

"Let 'em come," cried Galloway loudly, a heavy hand smiting a table-top so that a glass jumped and fell breaking to the floor. "Only," and he sent his voice booming out warningly, "any man who chips in unasked and starts trouble in my house can take what's coming to him."

So then Vidal had just arrived, it had been his sudden entrance which had invoked the silence in the barroom. Norton merely shrugged; there had been a chance of taking Vidal alone, intercepting him. But that chance had not been one to wait for; now it was past, negligible, not to be regretted. At last he knew where Vidal Nunez was and it was his business to make an arrest and not to wait upon further chance. The man who is not ready to go into a crowd to get his law-breaker is not the man to stand for sheriff in the Southwest country.

"Coming, Galloway!"

Norton's ringing shout came back in answer. Suddenly the steady pulse of his blood had been stirred, the hot hope stood high in his heart again that he and Jim Galloway were going to look into each other's eyes with guns talking and an end of a long devious trail in sight. For the moment he half-forgot Vidal Nunez whom he could fancy cowering in a corner.

Then when he knew that every man in the Casa Blanca had turned sharply at his voice he ran from the window to the street, turned the corner of the building and dashed in at the wide front doorway. A short hall, a closed door confronting him—then that had been flung open and on its threshold, a gun in each hand, his hat far back on his head, his eyes on fire he stood looking in on a half-dozen men and three glinting steel barrels which, describing quick arcs, were whipped from the window toward him.

A gun in Galloway's hand, one in the hand of Vidal Nunez, the third already spitting fire as Kid Rickard's narrowed eyes shone above it. The other men had fallen back precipitately to right and left; Norton noted that Elmer Page was among them, a pace or two from Rickard's side.

The Kid, being young, had something of youth's impatience, perhaps the only suggestion of youth left in a calloused soul. So it was that he had shot a second too soon. Norton, as both hands rose in front of him, answered Kid Rickard with the smaller-caliber gun while the Colt in his right hand was trained impartially upon Galloway and Vidal Nunez, standing close together. The Kid cursed, his voice rising in a shriek of anger rather than pain, spun

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about and fell backward, tripping over an overturned chair.

"Shoot, Galloway!" cried Norton coming a swift stride nearer. "Shoot, —— you, shoot!"

Now, as for the second time that day the two men confronted each other, naked, hot hatred glaring out of their eyes, each man knew that he stood balancing upon a crucial second, midway between death and triumph. Jim Galloway, who never until now had come out into the open in defiance of the law, must swallow his words under the eyes of his own gang, or once and for all forsake the semi-security behind his ambush. Again issues were clear-cut.

He answered the sheriff with a ripping curse and a stream of lead. As he fired he threw himself to the side, the old trick, his gun little higher than his hip, and fired again. Again and again. And shot for shot Norton answered him.

And, though but half the length of a room lay between them, as yet neither man was hurt. For no longer were they in the rich light of the swinging coal-oil lamp; the room was gathered in pitch darkness; their guns spat long tongues of vivid flame.

For, just as Kid Rickard was falling, while Jim Galloway's finger was tightening upon his trigger, while Antone was whipping up his gun from where he stood behind the bar, there had come a shot from the card-room door shattering the lamp, jerking into black nothingness all of those tense figures so filled with menace. And neither Norton nor Galloway, Rickard or Vidal Nunez or Antone or any of the other men in the room saw who had fired the shot. And it was in a rayless gloom that Galloway and Rod Norton sought to deal death to each other.

AS THE light went out Norton leaped away from the door, having little wish to stand silhouetted against the rectangle of pale light from the outer night. And leaping he poured in his fourth and fifth and sixth shots in the quarter where he hoped to find Galloway.

But always he remembered where he had seen Elmer Page standing, and always he remembered Antone behind the bar, and Vidal Nunez drawn back into a corner. His forty-five emptied, he jammed it back into its holster and stood rigid, staring into the blackness about him, every sense on the *qui vive*. Galloway had given over shooting; he might be dead or merely waiting. Vidal had held his fire, seeming frightened, uncertain, half-stunned. Antone would be leaning forward, peering with frowning eyes, trying to locate him.

It swept into Norton's mind suddenly that thus, in utter and unexpected darkness, he had the upper hand. He could shoot, the law riding upon each flying pellet of lead, and be it Jim Galloway or Antone or Vidal or any other of Galloway's crowd who fell, it would be a man who richly deserved what his fate was bringing him. They, on the other hand, being many against one, must be careful which way they shot.

Almost as abruptly as darkness had invaded the Casa Blanca barroom, now did an utter silence shut down upon the din of reverberating pistol shots. Norton was stock-still where he stood, the lighter gun transferred swiftly to his right hand, his mind grappling actively with altered conditions. Galloway was dead or waiting—or had silently given over to cursing his spent ammunition. Kid Rickard still lay upon the floor, Vidal was crouching in his corner, for though neither was to be seen, their forms blotted out by the dark, yet there had come never the stirring of a boot or creak of a floor board. They, like himself, were rigidly motionless.

He had come for Vidal Nunez. The man he wanted was yonder, but a few feet from him. Duty and desire pointed across the room to the obscure corner.

He moved a cautious foot. The floor complained under his shifting weight and from Galloway's quarter came a spit of fire. Twin with it came a shot from behind the bar. That was Antone talking. And now at last came the other shot from Vidal himself.

Rod Norton's was that type of man which finds caution less to his liking than headlong action; furthermore, in the present crisis, caution had seemed the acme of foolhardiness. There are times when true wisdom lies in taking one's chance boldly, flying half-way to meet it. Now, as three bullets sang by him he gathered himself; then, before the sharp reports had died in his ears he sprang forward, hurling himself across the room, striking with his lifted gun as he went, missing, striking again and experiencing that grinding, crunching sensation transmitted along the metal barrel as it

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struck a man fair upon the head. The man went down heavily and Norton stood over him praying that it was Vidal Nunez.

Then it was that Julius Struve, having deserted his post at the rear, smashed through a window with the muzzle of his shotgun, sending the shade flipping up, springing back from the square of faint light, crying out sharply——

"All right, Nort?"

"All right!" cried Norton. "I'm against the north wall; rake the other side and the bar with your shotgun if they don't step out. You and Cutter together. I've got Rickard and Nunez out of it. Drop your gun, Galloway; lively, while you've got the chance. Antone, Struve's got a shotgun!"

Antone cursed and with the snarl of his voice came the clatter of a revolver slammed down on the bar. Galloway cursed and fired, emptying his second gun, crazed with hatred and blind anger. And again, shot for shot Norton answered him. And again it grew very silent in the Casa Blanca.

"Out through the window, one by one, with your hands up and your guns down," shouted Struve; "or I start in. Which is it, boys?"

There was a scramble to obey, the several men who had taken no part leading the way. As they went out their forms were for a moment clearly outlined, then swallowed up in the outer darkness. At Struve's command they lined up against the wall, watched over by the muzzle of his shotgun. Antone, crying out that he was coming, followed. Elmer Page, sick and dizzy, was at Antone's heels.

Tom Cutter had gathered up some dry grass and with that and a chance-found bit of wood started a blaze near the second window; in its wavering, uncertain light the faces of the men stood out whitely.

"Galloway is not here yet," he snapped. And, lifting his voice, "Come on, Galloway."

A crowd had gathered in the street, asking questions that went unanswered. Other hands added fuel to Cutter's fire. The increasing light at last penetrated the blackness filling the barroom.

"Come out, Galloway," said Struve coldly. "I've got you covered."

Since things were bad enough as they were and he had no desire to make them worse and saw no opportunity to better them, Jim Galloway, his hand nursing a bleeding shoulder, stumbled awkwardly through the opening.

"Is that all of 'em, Roddy?" called Cutter.

Norton didn't answer. Cutter called again. Then, while the crowd surged about door and window, he came in, a revolver in his right hand, a torch of a burning faggot in his left, held high.

Vidal Nunez was dead; not from a blow upon the head but from a chance bullet through the heart after he had fallen. Kid Rickard, his sullen eyes wide with their pain, lay half under a poker-table. Lying across the body of Nunez, as though still guarding his prisoner, was the quiet form of Rod Norton, his face bloodlessly white save for the smear of blood which ran from the wound hidden by the close-cropped, black hair.

TO BE CONTINUED

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ON THE FAR EDGE

by S. B. H. HURST

Author of "Taste of the Salt," "Maze of Memory," etc.

TO ADD to the significance of this record—and to old-timers it will add interest—I will preface it with the statement that it has to do with events taking place about fourteen years before the great Klondike Rush. We were in Alaska—at least, we thought we were—and the population was about one to every million square miles. That is, it was in the more "settled" parts; we had wandered into a district where there were no people at all—not even Indians.

It was the coldest day I ever remember—but that may be wrong, because we had no thermometer and had reasons for feeling the cold—and it was a very short day, too. It might be added that both my companion and myself were almost sure it was our last, although we didn't discuss that part of it. I think that Dick—it was Dick Mansell, of course—was further gone than I.

The trail always seemed to get him harder—perhaps because he was eight inches the taller. Our ammunition was exhausted, our dogs dead—we had eaten the last one three days before, and hadn't had a bite since, unless you count chewing a piece of an old shoe—and we were thirsty because we were afraid if we stopped to melt snow we would never start again.

Take it altogether, our position was not enviable. The result of a fool prospecting trip in an absolutely unknown country. Even today it would be folly to try what we did—it was a mixture of youth and suicide then. All about us was the white waste; with a gray, gloomy sky that told of more snow getting ready to fall. It was not a flat country, but a curious grouping of small hills—like a prairie-dog village on a large scale—with now and then a clump of scrub trees. But never a sign of even an Arctic hare or a lazy ptarmigan. Of course, we kept straining our sight for game without knowing how we would tackle it.

It was worse than being lost—we had been practically lost since we left the last mining camp, months before—because we had no longer any objective, nothing to aim at. It was a queer feeling, like being mixed up with infinity or something else quite out of your class. I want this to sink in: this unknown, out of the way, Arctic country. Sir John Franklin's men died wandering in such a place. But we had a right to expect more game than we found—we shot away our cartridges on well-nigh impossible distance shots, until we grew frantic and unsteady with the twitching of our need.

And now, strong men that we were, we were done. Something in us that I am proud to remember kept us to the trail when weaker men would have made a hole in the snow or gone to cannibalism. It is that last test which shows up the fallacy of claiming that all men are born equal. We staggered on, now and then trying to grin at one another. The last day part of it was probably too obvious for discourse, although I did wonder about what my last dream would be and devoutly hoped it would be about a square meal, because, of course, I wouldn't wake up before the food got into my mouth as I had done in all the recent

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food-dreams. Without putting it in words we knew we would travel until one of us could go no further—then we would go to sleep together, very comfortably; for such is the blessing of that death.

The vague hope of meeting some one on as foolish an expedition as ourselves was spoiled by the certainty that whoever we met would be as badly off as we were. Yet, the bit of light made the snow look beautiful—illusively warm with a medley of refracted tints. Just when a gust of self-pity bade me take a last look at earth, Mansell suddenly fell to his knees.

This was not unusual. We had been falling frequently for the last two days. The question was, would he get up again? I stood looking at him, wondering wearily if I was able to help him, when I noticed that he was sniffing with feeble eagerness.

A feeling of utter horror chilled me so that the surrounding air seemed almost warm. Was this man, this friend of a life, going to pass out mad? If I live to be a hundred, I will not forget that moment, nor will I ever know such agony of mind.

"I smell smoke," he croaked.

I said nothing—just continued to stand swaying in an aimless sort of way, waiting to fall. Then to my astonishment, as if a miracle had given him the nourishment of a sudden meal, my friend got to his feet.

"Come on," he gasped, and began to go forward at a surprising speed considering his condition and the shape of the trail. There wasn't any trail but what we made, and the snow was powdery like desert sand. I managed to follow him, wishing he took shorter strides, but I couldn't smell any smoke, and came to the conclusion that my pal was going to go out in a spell of delirium, that the smoke he smelled was a sort of nose-mirage. Then I was galvanized by something that sang past my head, followed by the unmistakable crack of a rifle.

"Hospitality?" Mansell turned and tried to grin at me.

His face was an awful sight, what with frost-bite scabs and camp smoke.

"Come on," he added, "and we went on, skirting a clump of trees, and coming upon a snowed-in cabin, with the door cleared, toward which we went as rapidly as we could, careless of the person with the gun.

Mansell got there first, hesitated and then hammered on the door. To our surprise, there was no answer.

"He must be outside some place," said Dick hoarsely. "Shot at us from behind a tree, eh?"

"Seems that way," I answered. "Let's go in."

THE door was not barred, which seemed to confirm Dick's theory. A red-hot stove welcomed us, and we hurriedly shut the door—barring it against the owner and his gun. There was grub and a box of matches on the table—it might have been all set for our benefit. I struck a match and lit a lamp that hung from the roof. On the edge of the stove a bubbling pot of coffee gave us further delightful welcome. On a shelf were cups, cutlery and canned stuff. It was astonishing, like a dream—for a moment I didn't know if it wasn't that dream I had wanted. I can not describe how we felt.

A man on the scaffold, suddenly released because the real murderer had confessed, might appreciate the state of things, but the average man couldn't if I wrote all night about it. The cabin was marvelously neat and clean—a woman might have been in charge of it. At one end were three bunks, one over the other, piled high with gray blankets. But there was no further sign of the owner.

Little we worried about anything then, except about what the sudden heat might do in the way of "tickling" our frost-bites, and not very much about that. We couldn't speak. Dick filled the cups with the boiling coffee, opened the door a bit and set them to cool for a few moments—we wanted that drink, craved it. Then he shut the door again, and the grateful drink made different men of us. After that we ate for a long time, with smiling digestions spite our fast.

"Ah," said my friend in his natural voice, breathing deep, "great. The chap who shot at us must be outside. What shall we do—hold the fort and parley with him when he comes?"

"Guess so," I replied. "By the way, Dick, I thought I smelled powder when I lit the lamp."

"What's the odds," said Dick. "Must have been the match—sulfur, you know."

"Maybe," I said thoughtfully, "but I've got an idea that the rifle was fired from inside the cabin here."

"Then he made a quick get-away. But

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we should worry. I am almost sorry I can not eat any more. Don't care if the chap did fire at us—we're more than even."

So we lit our pipes. If you have never tasted tobacco after an experience like ours you don't know what smoking really means. The absence of our unwilling host was nothing to trouble, but the fact of there being a cabin there, with any one living in it, was matter for very interesting speculation. You will remember my emphasizing the loneliness of the country, the reference to Franklin. And we were tired and comfortably sleepy, which added to the unreality of the whole thing.

"But what is any one living here for, anyway," mused Dick between puffs. "It's too permanent for a prospector, and we saw nothing of a mine. Besides—oh Lord, what's the use?"

"No signs." I got up and began to walk 'round the cabin. "It's too clean, and—look!"

I threw aside the blanket of the lower bunk, exposing a hundred or more books. Dick came to my side.

"No trapper," I went on, startled, "at least not the ordinary sort. Look at the titles—philosophy, poetry—this is a man of education, Dick, and the cleanness of the place means refinement. You don't see any old socks hanging about."

"Maybe it's a woman," said Dick, examining the books eagerly. "Which would explain the shot, in a way."

"And—" I stared at him—"she must be outside, hiding from us!"

It was a disturbing thought. The woman, living in these wilds alone for some reason, was naturally afraid of men coming her way. There was no protection, and many of the men who drift so far from the civilized world are not the sort a woman would want to be alone with.

"We must find her, explain, thank her for the grub—we have money, if she'll take it—and get out," said my friend decidedly.

I nodded agreement, feeling horribly ashamed, thinking of the woman out in the snow.

"And she must have gone out in a hurry—left the coffee on the stove—no proper clothes. Come on—she may be frozen to death. ——!"

We hurried to the door and opened it. A whirl of white flung in on us, and for the first time we noticed how the wind had risen. It was blowing a blizzard. I could think of nothing but the woman, and the fear of having indirectly murdered her chilled me. We ran to where we had thrown our outer garments, talking rapidly.

"How can we find her? We must take different ways, and shout. And don't forget that a blizzard numbs your intelligence before it numbs your sensations. Let's take some of the blankets to wrap her in," spluttered Dick.

I grabbed at the heap of blankets in the top bunk, and started back stifling a cry of surprise and pulling at my empty gun. For I had uncovered a man in the top bunk—a man who had lain there hidden ever since we came into the place—the man who had fired at us. I remember marveling at his quietness, and then Dick jumped for him and took away the rifle that lay by his side. He huddled up in a half-sitting position, staring at us with a mingling of fear and rage, out of eyes that blazed with what looked like the light of madness. For some moments we stood there, staring back and forth.

"Well?" said Dick, shortly.

The man made no answer, but he seemed to shrink a little more, as if the sound of Dick's voice frightened him.

"We won't hurt you," said my friend.

But the owner of the cabin—for he could be no one else—remained silent, still staring. He was about fifty, very clean, in a shirt and pants; his hair was only slightly disarranged and he had shaved that day.

"Will you have—can we do anything for you—won't you get up and talk—we are only lost travelers, thankful for your hospitality," stumbled Dick, desperately.

BUT the man would not answer. Only, out of those seemingly mad eyes he stared. Then he suddenly lay down again, turned his back to us, and took no further notice of our presence.

We looked at each other, and Mansell tapped his forehead significantly.

"Now we understand the shot," he whispered. "He's so scared of being discovered that he's gone crazy—our fault, but how were we to know he was hiding. Wonder what it is." He shook the man's shoulder gently. "We swear we don't mean any harm," he went on. "Just happened here accidentally, and very glad to find you. You saved our lives. You don't think

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we'd do you any harm after that, do you?"

But the man persisted in his silence, and we were nonplussed. To begin with, in spite of the meal we were only keeping on our feet by sheer will. We were done—all in. What on earth were we to do?

"And why are there three bunks?" I asked.

"Perhaps he has partners. God knows. Maybe he's just waiting for the other two to come to do us up," answered Dick, lighting his pipe, which had gone out while he questioned our host.

"No," I said decidedly. "He's all alone. The books, you know. And the blankets in the middle bunk have not been used since they were washed. The top bunk is the one he sleeps in. The other two are never used."

"But why three bunks?" persisted my friend.

"I don't know, and I don't care. I'm going to divide the blankets with you, except the ones he's using, and turn in. I'm dead," I yawned.

Dick went to the door and rebarred it.

"It's good to hear the wind howling—when you're warm inside," he said. "I'm with you on the turning in. What a treat to undress after what we've gone through. Wish we had a bath, though."

"You want too much," I grinned. "Dowse the glim when you're ready."

I began to throw off my clothes, but Mansell didn't follow my example.

"What's the matter now?" I protested.

"I was thinking," he whispered. "We can not go to sleep—for we'll both be dead to the world in a minute—and leave our friend to play with that rifle, or anything else he fancies. I'd sleep with it, but he'd get it without waking me. No, Barney, rude and ungrateful as it may seem, we've got to tie our host up, so he can not collect his rent from us, by taking our scalps, when we're asleep. He's a bit unusual, you know."

I saw the sense of Dick's suggestion, although I liked it no better than he did. So we bound our man with various odds and ends as securely as we could—working with half-closed eyes like doped men. We had come in with numbed minds, and the food had just about stopped their working altogether. This was certainly the reason why we failed to notice the man hiding in the bunk, for I doubt if any one could have hidden from us all that time if we had been normal.

I have a vague memory of the tying up but no memory of getting into the bunk where I awoke late next day, to find our host sitting easily on the table, with the rifle in his hands. Mansell's long legs cut off my view for a moment, as my friend slid out of the bunk above me and began to get into his clothes, a significant gesture from our host's rifle causing me to follow his example.

I felt pretty mad, and Dick was in no sweeter temper. Why hadn't we tied the fellow up properly—we could have prodded ourselves into the requisite wakefulness if we had only had the gumption? But it was too late now, unless we took a chance and rushed the man with the gun, and there seemed to be nothing to gain by doing that. Dick demanded water, and the rifle indicated where we could wash. Breakfast waited on the table, and our annoyance had not spoiled our appetites. We ate, wondering what was going to happen, until Mansell spoke to me.

"What is the wordless mystery going to do, Barney?" putting enough rudeness into his tone to sting the man who watched us.

"He is going to send you on your way—" the voice was what we had expected, cultivated, refined—"with enough food for ten days. You acted decently or you would not be alive. But you will be the first white men to go with the knowledge of my existence. You will no doubt talk about me between yourselves; but in return for the food I am going to ask you both to promise on your honor that you will not speak of my being here to a single individual."

We promised, and the mysterious hermit laid the rifle back in his bunk.

"I apologize for shooting at you," he continued, "but if you were in my place you would have done likewise. It was my good-nature, which will some day get me into trouble, which prevented my shooting again, and sent me hiding in the bunk. Since you have promised not to talk about me—and I see you can be trusted—I may say that I have a secret which drives me to this way of life, and makes me act queerly when I have visitors. I do not often have visitors."

And that was all he told us. He lay down in his bunk again, and we went outside and found a light sled packed with

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grub. On top of the pack were certain written directions, and a request that the paper be destroyed when we had no further use for its guidance. We turned back to the cabin door, and said good-by to our strange host, but he did not answer us. Yet we did not feel that we had any reason to be angry.

The day was clear, and the trail fair. We were very different men from what we had been the day before. When a small hill hid the cabin from us, Dick stopped.

"That fellow's a good judge of human nature," he said. "I wonder how many men who came to him as we did would go on their way as we are doing—without sneaking back to make him give up his 'secret'?"

"I don't want to talk like a prig," I answered, "but very few would keep their word, and fewer still would fail to go back tonight. Because, Dick, that secret of his is a fat cache of gold."

"Surest thing you know," replied my partner, as we plodded south.

But that logical supposition did not explain all the mystery. Men are scarce enough in that part of the world today, and in those days a man where he was meant much more than the search for gold. Gold he might have found, but he had not gone to that desolation to look for it. No, the greater part of his secret was his living in that cabin, and in why he had ever gone there to live.

And now the scene shifts. At the loom of life Fate spins another pattern. Mansell and I had gone on a foolish expedition, whereon we had played pitch and toss with death. A miracle of circumstances which imagination would have scorned, had saved us. Sometimes I touch the reason for it, vaguely as one strives after a transient tune: but it eludes me when I try to cage it in words.

Well, we made our way to the outside, almost broke; then the lure of gold took us to Nevada, where I lost my partner. Dick was shot by one of those all too common things who imagine that the wearing of an officer's star makes them a sort of unaccountable demigod.

What good was the vengeance? It did not bring Dick back to life, and it did not cheer me on my way back to the old home in Cornwall, where his mother's cable had begged me to take him. Far better, it seemed, that we had died together, somewhere out on the lonely trail—there was something horrible about the last journey we made: Dick nailed up in a box.

But it made it easier for his mother—resting him in the old vault with his ancestors—and I tried to comfort her by telling her about the graves on the outskirts of mining-camps, and other places, so many of them nameless, and all of them so far away from home. It was very peaceful in the old churchyard, birds twittering sleepily in the ivy on the walls, smoke from chimneys going straight up, lazily, distant voices of children playing—the kindly face of Mother England, with so many world-scattered sons.

Naturally, we talked about the flotsam of the world, men who had gone away from such scenes and never come back; of those who had waited for them, of the news of their deaths, and, which was worse, no news at all. Why, in that tiny village I found no less than six cases of men who had gone away; and I took with me many tearful messages, to be delivered should my wanderings make it possible.

I PLANNED to go North again, but before I left England it was necessary that I go to London to get a small sum of money a dead relative had left to my credit at the Mid-London Bank. It is a very old bank, and I lunched with the manager, and happened to talk about my pet subject—this missing men, this flotsam hobby of mine.

"So," said the manager, "then you would find a world of romance in our cellar at the bank."

"Why?" I asked, hardly expecting a bank cellar to be connected with drifting wastrels.

"Because you are interested in people who never come back," he answered. "But come along, and I'll show you what I mean."

So we went back to the bank, and the manager opened a big safe that was let into the wall, which turned out to be the beginning of a short flight of stone steps, leading into the cellar.

It was a wonderful cellar, not because of the concrete invulnerability of it, but because of its contents—hundreds of boxes and chests of every description and character, from a modern steel dispatch box to a rusty iron-bound chest which might have belonged to the captain of a vessel of the Spanish Armada.

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"A regular museum," I gasped. "But what's the idea—why not a regular safe-deposit system? It looks as if every one of your customers had brought his own deposit-box."

"They did," said the manager placidly, "and they do. The custom of this bank is to have the depositor bring his valuables in a box of his own providing, instead of hiring a box from us, as with other vaults. You see, if you rent a box from a safe-deposit company, and don't show up to pay the rent, after a certain time they can open your box. With us, the box is never opened until the person who leaves it with us comes back to do so. Even the holder of a power of attorney can not open one of the boxes in this cellar—only the person who actually leaves the box with us. This has been our system for more than two hundred years."

"It's a good one," I replied carelessly.

The manager looked at me, smiling.

"Don't you see the significance of it?" he asked.

I admitted that I did not.

"Then, look here," he said. "See the number on this old box. I happen to remember that at 2:30 on the afternoon of the twelfth of January, 1765, that box was left with us for safe-keeping, until he should come back to claim it, by James V. Antrobus. Well, he hasn't come back yet."

"And you don't know what's in it—you haven't opened it?" I gasped.

"Certainly not—that box will remain here, unopened, until that James V. Antrobus comes back in person to claim it. That was our agreement with him, and we shall keep the agreement."

"But he won't come back," I said fatuously.

"We don't expect him," replied the manager.

"But his heirs?" I queried.

"Heirs can not touch it. Heirs have tried it, but the House of Lords upheld our agreement with our clients."

"But—it's absurd," I said.

"Probably, but think of the security. A man can leave anything here, and be quite sure that no eyes but his own will ever see it."

"And—are there many that don't come back?"

"Thirty-four per cent. never return after the first visit—that Antrobus, for example—and twenty-two per cent. die without taking their boxes away."

"But think of the interesting stuff there must be in the boxes," I exclaimed. "Apart from the money value, think of the historical value of the documents—the truth about unsolved crimes perhaps—the documents lying in some of those old chests."

"No doubt. And some time we may petition Parliament to set a time limit upon our trust. But at present we can only imagine some of the wonderful things—and restrain our curiosity."

"Lord," I ejaculated, "I wonder what became of the men who left boxes here and didn't come back for them. How their thoughts must have turned to them at the last!"

"I thought it would interest you."

"And it's a wonder some antiquarian hasn't robbed you out of curiosity," I said.

"Strange to say—for although we always kept a watchman, we only recently built a modern safe door to guard the place—strange to say, we have never been robbed. A box was broken into once, but nothing taken out. We never found out who did it. I say nothing was taken, because we made a list of what we found in the broken box, and it was full of valuable stuff that any thief would have made away with. Perhaps curiosity prompted the chap who broke in. Come up-stairs and have a smoke, and I'll show you the only record we have of the contents of any of these boxes—the one broken into—and tell you what I know about the man it belonged to. We had trouble with his estate, but we won, and the relocked box is still here."

And a very interesting hour I spent—greatly regretting when train-time dragged me away from the old bank with its cellar of buried mysteries.

I couldn't stay in England, for I could never stand business—even if a capital of twelve hundred dollars would have stood it—and I would rather beg than hunt a job. Somewhere there was gold—nice yellow gold, at whose glitter the whole world dances, and whose clink stirs the female heart to love. Wonderful stuff! And some sort of second sight had shown me that the northwest corner of the American continent was to become the Mecca of its seekers. But I could find few who agreed with me.

True, some of the British Columbia mines had turned out well, but the notion of richer ground further north was absurd. Look at the poor devils who had wasted the

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years up there. I was even told that Y. T. and Alaska were too cold for gold to be found in large quantities, and the speaker was serious.

I bought a few things in Seattle—Seattle in 1885 was about the most unlikely prospect for a great city that the world ever saw—and went up on a stern-wheeler that was only kept from falling apart by the stickiness of the pitch between its seams. The food was abusive, the crew were scourings and the passengers were a mixture of brigands and outcasts; while the cargo consisted of beans, bacon and whisky, with a missionary to some Indian tribe which would have been better off without him.

A poker game ran day and night in the saloon, and, take it altogether, we were quite comfortable, in spite of the likelihood of the fore part of the ship becoming separated from the stern, like two railway cars accidentally uncoupled. But we made it, and then came the burning question—for me—whether to buy dogs at an exorbitant price, with a heavy load of dried salmon for dog-feed, or go on alone, packing my grub, and chancing game. I was alone for the first time, and when a man has become accustomed to a partner he trusts as he trusts himself, he finds it harder to get along alone than a widower does when his wife dies after years of life together.

BUT I won't dwell on that. Suffice it to say that I went on without dogs, on a self-arranged trail that took me far from the route of what few prospectors there were in the country. And with me went a theory—a notion that grew and grew, that twisted one way and looked true, that turned around and seemed false. And it was not the sort of thing a man would want to be mistaken in. For every time I decided to test my theory, stark fear rose up to prevent me. And while I was naturally nervous about myself, the real fear concerned others.

But I believe that the ultimate ethical test of action is the amount of happiness involved in it. Omitting acts of justice, so called—which in most cases are simply dirty revenge served on a silver platter—if to do a thing will give more pleasure than pain to self and others—do it. If more pain then pleasure—don't to it. Elaborating somewhat on this rather bald outline of conduct, I made up my mind to go ahead. So, as you will have probably guessed, I struck out for the lonely man in the cabin, which Dick Mansell and I had visited two years before.

True, I was breaking my word; but as I believed I was going to do the isolated man a service I decided not to trouble myself about that. Yet, it did trouble. And the nearer I got to my destination the heavier did the weight of it become. For, after all, I had so very little to go on. A woman's face, pale with yearning, had started me; and the quixotism of youth had carried me on. A date in a certain year, a little bit of knowledge from which I had drawn a far-fetched deduction, and a few guesses—that was all I had to build on.

And every mile brought it clearer to me that, not only was I breaking my word, but I was, also, making a fool of myself. But suppose I was right—ah, that would be wonderful. Yes, wonderful. But suppose I was wrong. . . To be quite candid, as I lay by my fire the night before I reached the cabin, the only bit of comfort I could find was in the hope that the lonely man would not recognize me. You see, the first time I visited the cabin, I must have looked like a black-face minstrel, who, having the mange, was trying to hide it behind some months of straggly beard.

I got a good deal of comfort out of that memory, and went to sleep, after giving my conscience some knock-out drops because it persisted in telling me that curiosity and not philanthrophy was sending me to the cabin, and I awoke to another of that series of delightful days. If a man who had never been in Alaska had been suddenly transported to where I cooked my breakfast, he would have bet his roll that he was in Oregon. But all the poets of the world have mixed word-cocktails of Spring, the throbbing, yearning scents of it, the snow running away from every sunrise, the curiously invigorating smell of the blue flowers—so I will merely say that it stimulated me to eat a tremendous breakfast, and that afterward I set forward toward the cabin.

I rounded a small hill and saw it, and much to my annoyance I found that I was trembling with excitement. It was like five minutes before the start of a football game. Then I saw that no smoke came from the chimney, and made a hurried rush about ten yards to the right and forward to get the screen of three trees that grew close

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together. I expected the man in the cabin to shoot, and he might not miss this time. But there was no shot. Except for the varied earth sounds, waking after the long Winter, everything was quiet. Had he gone away, was he dead, or was he hiding some place, waiting to get the sights on me?

It was no use shouting that I was a friend and that my intentions were good. A profession of friendliness would only make him more suspicious, he would shoot first and listen to explanations afterward—if the man he shot at were able to explain. So I rid myself of my gear, and began to crawl toward the cabin, taking advantage of every bit of protection that offered. It was slow work, because every now and then I lay still, hoping for a sight of him.

Then the folly of it all made me angry. Why the devil should I bother about the fellow? Making an ass of myself. If, as I thought, he was living in this desolation because he was afraid of being hanged, what sort of a chance was I taking? No one would be any the wiser if he did shoot me, and it wouldn't matter to the man in the cabin, if any one was. He could only be hanged once. Distance had most certainly lent enchantment to my expedition, for the nearer I got the more sorry I became for myself. And I had gone too far to turn back. And I felt pretty sure that my theory about the chap was all wrong. But—oh ——, hadn't I told those poor women that if I ever got a chance I would deliver their messages? I wondered if the others would be as exciting as this one.

But he didn't show, so, becoming more wary, I lay on my stomach and wriggled onward.

But I couldn't go all the way to the cabin in this manner. Perhaps a dozen yards from the door, I reached the last bit of protection, and there I rested. My next move would have to be on my feet, and rápid—taking the chance of getting to him before he could shoot. I anticipated a scrap, but I figured that youth and strength were on my side, and that I would be able to disarm him. I hadn't brought my gun along, because I certainly couldn't shoot him—and a man always knows when you are bluffing and don't mean to shoot—and I was pretty sure that he would take a chance, and shoot at me, drop or no drop.

So I lay there, waiting, but there was never a sign of him. It was unlikely that he had seen me and was waiting, because he was of the nervous type that can not wait; therefore he was away from the cabin, or, at any rate, hadn't seen me. I got to my feet, and ran to the cabin door. It was wide open, and for a moment I stared into the shadows. Then I saw my man's eyes, staring at me from over the edge of the top bunk. It was maddening to think that all my precautions had been a waste of time and effort.

I MADE two jumps, and got my hands on him, before he spoke.

"So," he said, "you've been here before."

"How do you know?" I admitted.

"Because I have always pretended that I would kill any one that came back. But I'm too sick of life to care which of the four you are, Mr. Man-who-can-not-keep-his-word. Was it curiosity that brought you?"

"No—it was something I heard in England."

I sat on the edge of the table, for I saw he had no gun with him in the bunk, and his angry eyes glared at me.

"You dirty sneak," he gritted, "so you have been nosing around trying to find out something, have you? I remember you now, and I wish I had shot you instead of pretending."

"Why," I pretended surprise, "what do you mean?"

"That you have been playing detective, and imagine you have something about me. Of course you haven't, but you want me to pay you to leave me alone. Well, I won't! Blackmailer!"

"I came here to tell you a story." I was keeping my temper with difficulty. "After I have told it, I give you my word that I will go away and leave you in peace—if you want me to."

"Your word," he sneered.

"I won't get angry with you. You've been here alone so long that you can not be blamed for discourtesy."

"Oh, get done with your tale, and get out—if you really mean to go."

I was so mad—after all the trouble I had taken to do him, as I thought, a favor—that if he had been my own age a good scrap would have been necessary. But I pretended to smile, and went on:

"Did it ever strike you that we sit in a

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game of poker, with Fate in the dealer's chair, and that, being an expert lady, she hides a cold deck in her hair?"

"You're a poor story-teller," he snarled. "Why don't you condense, and say that we are often cold-decked by circumstance?"

"All right," I bowed elaborately, pleased at having roused his interest. "Have it your own way. And I have come here to offer you a fresh deal—with a straight deck."

"I thought you were here to tell a story, and get out?" he suggested coldly.

This time I swore, and he laughed, which steadied me to my original line of talk:

"However, somehow I'd rather be cold-decked and quit the game broke but smiling, than I'd win on a measly pair of deuces. That's all a lot of men's hands are worth, but because they're lucky, and no one troubles to call them, they go through life 'respectable.' Just cheap bluffs, after all, not worth calling. I'd rather take a chance. God took an awful chance when He made man, so why not follow His example?"

"Sounds like a poor sermon," he commented. "Pardon me, but you said you were going to tell a story. Did you mean recite a tract?"

Then I didn't care what he said, because I was feeling rotten, and pretty sure that my guess about him was all wrong. My attempt to gain his confidence by philosophizing was only a part of the failure of my whole scheme. But I meant to go through with it, so I plunged ahead:

"The man in my story took a chance—too many chances. His worst failing was curiosity. He was always curious about things, was Walter Taylor."

I emphasized the name I thought was his, but he never even blinked. If I needed anything to satisfy me of my mistake, surely that was enough. I wished again that I had not come.

"Yes, Walter Taylor was curious. He lost all the money his parents left him from being unduly curious about the future prices of certain stocks and shares. And then, just when he realized he was broke, he met the girl—the one woman some men are so lucky as to meet."

Again I bore down on my words, but they did not move him. The wrong man, the wrong man—what an ass I had made of myself! He actually drawled—

"Must have a heroine—in a story."

"Yes," I snapped, "and being broke and in love he was at his wits' ends for money. Because the girl had promised to marry him. He ought to have told the girl about his troubles, because she was of the rare kind that marry for love, and never consider the money end of it. She was a real woman."

I paused. Was I mistaken, or did he shudder at my last words? Perhaps he was cold.

"Shall I shut the door—it's chilly yet?" I suggested.

"Never mind," he spoke hurriedly. "Get on with your story—please."

I glowed. At any rate, right or wrong, I was getting again his interest.

"Yes," I went on, "she was that sort of a girl. But Taylor didn't know, and the date for the wedding was fixed. So he went to London, to his bankers, The City, Limited, hoping in some vague way to make a loan. But banks don't loan money without security. The manager was very sorry, of course, but he couldn't break the rule."

I got off the table, and began to walk about, as I had once seen a very effective public speaker do.

"Imagine the poor fellow." I raised my voice. "Imagine him, walking out of that bank, wondering what to do, feeling that he can not marry the girl, and with only himself to blame for his position. You seem pretty cold-blooded, but surely you can be sympathetic with a chap in such a shape?"

"Are you asking me to criticize your —er—literary effort?" he drawled.

I went on without heeding him—I mean, without appearing to:

"So, Taylor walked along the street. He was well dressed, but he felt the equal of the poor devils of 'sandwich men.' Then, quite by chance, he came to another bank, Quite an interesting bank, this one. They have a cellar——"

"Ah!"

Like a panther, he was out of the bunk, grappling with me. We struggled for a few moments, but he had no chance. Youth and strength were mine, and the sudden joy of knowing I was right. After all his assumed indifference, after all his forced calm, I had compelled him to admit I was right in coming there. I forced him back into the bunk.

"Will you keep quiet, or will I have to tie you up—more securely than last time?" I panted.

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"Go ahead, —— you," his voice faltered. "I suppose you have a warrant in your pocket. But you'll never get me back alive. I'll finish myself some way."

"I hope to take you back, and then be best man at your wedding," I laughed.

"Oh, you swine, you utter swine," he cried. "You find all this out, and then taunt me about—about——"

But his voice failed. He was nearly crying. The years of loneliness must have been terrible. I turned my back.

"I give you my solemn word that I only mean well by you," I told him. "Listen, and tell me if I am right."

He did not answer. I have wondered since—many times—at my idiotic persistency in going on with my "story." I must have been awfully rattled.

"AS I WAS saying, Taylor came to this other bank, where he was not known. He may have had some faint idea about trying for a loan there, but it doesn't seem likely. Anyway, he went inside, and was not noticed in the crowd. He walked toward the manager's office, and found himself alone. The door to the cellar was open—some careless clerk, I suppose—and Taylor walked down the steps, and sat on one of the many boxes he found there. It is not so easy to get into that cellar now as it was when Taylor went there.

"He may have heard about those boxes—he must have heard—and, in a half-conscious way he began to wonder what was in them, as so many others have wondered. But most of all he thought about the girl, and his need of money. He didn't know how long he sat there, but he remembered taking off his hat as he entered the bank—it was a very hot day—and if any one saw his back as he went down the steps, he was taken for one of the clerks. Because when at last he came to himself, and realized where he was, he discovered it was late, that the bank was shut, and all the clerks had gone home."

I paused again, and turned to look at him; but his back was to me, and he made no sound.

"As I said, it was late, and quite dark in the cellar. He wondered, of course, why nobody had turned him out—and next day certain people lost their jobs because of their carelessness in not turning him out—and then he began to be quite consciously curious about the contents of the box he was sitting on. Life seemed ended for him, anyway. But, no, he would not steal. But why not open the box, just for fun? No, no, it wouldn't be right—besides he would get into trouble. Oh, rot, there would be ne harm. He need not take anything.

"Besides, that old box has been there for perhaps a hundred years. The owner died long ago, and the bank will give the stuff to no one else. Why not take a look? Now, as a matter of fact, it had grown so dark that Taylor could only make out the boxes by touching them, and he wasn't really sure whether the box he was thinking of opening had been there a hundred years or only a week. Almost without knowing it, he had walked into the cellar, as one may walk into any safe-deposit vault.

"Not once in years would the proper clerk forget to clear the cellar before locking it. They have a time-lock there now. And then, almost without knowing what he was doing, Taylor began to work to open the box with his knife. It was a fairly old box, and it opened easily. Taylor threw back the lid, which creaked horribly in the silence, and grabbed at the first thing that came to hand. It was a small roll of paper, tied with string. And at that moment the night watchman came down the cellar steps. As I said, they are less old-fashioned, and have a time-lock now.

"Well, Taylor felt terrible. It was not so much fear as disgust and shame. Again without thinking, he slipped the roll of paper into his pocket. What a lot chance was responsible for! The night watchman was coming toward him, swinging his lantern, and Taylor thought of the girl he was going to marry, and imagined how she would feel when he was sent to prison for robbing a bank. He must never go to prison. Not for his own sake—for hers.

"His mind was in a whirl. A dozen suggestions struggled for action, but, panic-stricken, he hesitated. And the watchman was coming closer, as if he suspected there was some one in the cellar. What was Taylor to do? Get away without being seen—for it would be folly to try to bribe the watchman with the little money he had—but how? And if the watchman did not see him, how would he escape next day? He held his breath, afraid the watchman would hear his wild heart-beats.

"The watchman was near him—going to

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raise the lantern. He would see him. Then, before being seen, Taylor jumped. He never knew what happened after that, but the next thing he knew the watchman was lying on the floor of the cellar, white and still, with a trickle of blood running from his head, and the ghastly light of the lantern showing his closed eyes. But he had not seen Taylor, who fled, leaving him there—to live or die, as fate decided.

"He made no attempt to take anything of value from the bank, his one idea being to get away. So he made for the docks. I am not quite sure what happened then, but I think he got a crimp to ship him on a sailing ship—perhaps he gave him his watch and chain—which went down the river that morning. At Gravesend they took on more stores, and some one brought a newspaper on board which told of the night watchman being found dead in the cellar, and said the police expected to catch his murderer shortly. The usual police stuff.

"BUT NO policeman came aboard the ship, and Taylor got away from England unmolested. The ship was bound for North America, and Taylor had a hard time of it, because he was no sailor and he had signed on in a sailor's place. But——"

The man jumped up, and swung his legs over the edge of the bunk with savage energy.

"You're playing with me as a cat does with a mouse," he cried. "Of course, I betrayed myself a little while ago, but you must have had enough evidence to get a warrant, or you wouldn't have come here. I don't know which is the more sickening: your lies about the reason you came here, or the silly, tiresome theories you have made up about how I got into that cellar. Why, you ass, do you think I could have walked into that cellar in broad daylight, with a dozen clerks in sight, unless I had been taken for some one who had a right to go there?

"You make me sick with your elaborate 'reasoning.' It happened this way. When I left my bank, I at once thought of the bank with the cellar. Not because of the cellar, but because I had known for a long time that the manager and I were doubles. His own wife had called me 'Harry' on the Strand, thinking I was her husband. Don't know whether he knew this, or not—he certainly did not know me. So, I went to the bank intending to impersonate the manager, which would have been no trouble at all.

"I was desperate. As I looked more like him with my hat off—doubles always do—I took off my hat as I went in. What I actually meant to do I don't know. As I said, I was desperate. But I saw the manager was in his private office, through the partly open door. So I turned into the cellar, pulling the door open, to wait and think. If any one saw me, they took me for the manager. For a person entirely without brains, you have guessed the rest fairly well. Do you want to put the handcuffs on me?"

I laughed.

"I'll tell you all my 'evidence.' A friend introduced me to certain women who had sons and sweethearts they wanted to communicate with—men who had disappeared. Miss Purcell——"

Taylor flung himself upon me, trying to shake me.

"Miss Purcell," he shouted in an extraordinary voice. "Did you say *Miss Purcell?*"

"Why, yes—she has been waiting for you to come back and marry her ever since the morning you said good-by and went to London to see your banker."

"Oh, my God. My good God!" It was a prayer, yet full of pain. "And I will go back to her—in handcuffs?"

"If you could keep your —— mouth shut long enough for me to explain, you would save yourself a lot of unhappiness," I bawled at him, almost throwing him into the lower bunk.

"Twenty years," he muttered. "She has been waiting twenty years for me. I'm not worth it."

"No man is," I said hastily. "But listen. Miss Purcell's story interested me more than any of the others, but it gave me no clue, for the photo she had of you was about as much like you are now as it was like myself. Then I went to London on business—to the bank with the wonderful cellar. I asked the manager if they had never been robbed. He said 'No,' but that some one once broke into a box, and he gave me the details. He said the box had been left there by an old H. B. C. factor, and that, as it was full of valuables, he supposed the coming of the watchman had scared the thief before he could take anything.

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"The manager who told me this was not the one who was your double—that one is dead. The date of the attempted robbery coincided with the date of your disappearance, as given me by Miss Purcell."

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"What is the rest of the evidence?"

"There isn't any."

"What?"

"That is all the evidence I obtained."

"Are you—telling the truth?"

"I am. Rather smart bit of work, I think. When I heard the box belonged to the factor, I thought of this lonely place, where only H. B. C. trappers would be likely to go. Of course, it was only a guess, but I supposed some voyager gave the factor a map, with a supposed gold pocket marked on it. The factor, having all the gold reports he wanted, and knowing most of them to be exaggerated—and this was so far off the beaten track, anyway—put the map in the box, and forgot it.

"I thought that, if you wanted to hide, you would find a pleasanter and safer place than this, unless something brought you here—that is, if you were Taylor, of course—so I guessed you found a map in the box. The coincidence of the dates was what helped most."

"And that was all the evidence?' "

"Yes."

"And if I hadn't betrayed myself you wouldn't have known I was Taylor?"

"I would not."

"Then you haven't enough to convict me."

"I don't want to, I told you. But don't you want to go home?"

"Home," he spoke wearily, sitting down on a bench by the table. "Home! Man, it's been hell. Waiting here all through the years, thinking of the girl married to another man, seeing nobody but a faithful Indian who gets me what I need. I took nearly two millions out of this pocket, but I'll give it to the factor's heirs, less my share for the work. And now you make it worse by telling me the girl is still waiting for me. For I can not go back, even if you don't mean to report me to the police."

"Why not. No one ever suspected you broke into the box. No one had any reason for connecting you with the affair—why should they? No stranger was seen going into the cellar. You were taken for the manager, if you were seen. The watchman never saw your face. I don't see why you should give the gold to the heirs, but the idea does you credit, and some way can be found to do it without betraying you. Why can you not go back?"

"How can I go back, marry a decent woman, when my conscience tells me every hour that I killed the watchman. The paper said he was dead. I read it aboard the ship next day."

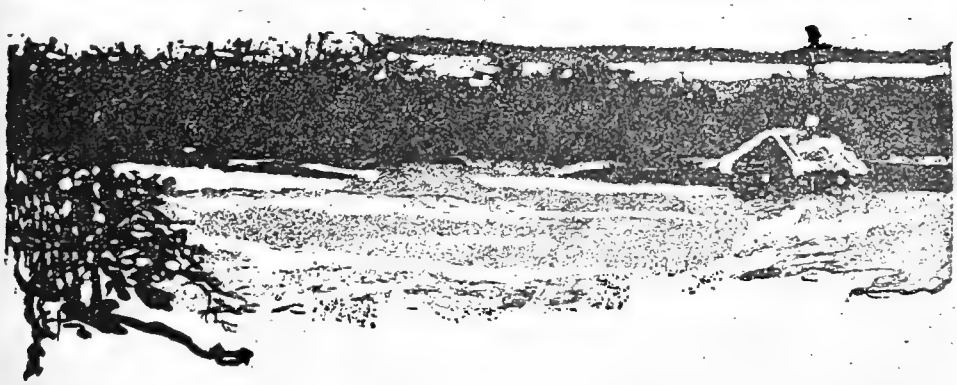
"That was a police trick," I said.

"But he is dead, isn't he?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, he's dead—I told you that, didn't I?"

"Then, you see——"

"Oh, I wish you'd let me say what I want to." I laughed. "The watchman is dead. But he was only stunned by you. He went to work the next day. Died of natural causes, of old age, about a week before I left England."



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PAY-DAY

by ROY P. CHURCHILL

Author of "Arab," "The Frayed Strand," etc.

IT WAS pay-day on the U. S. S. *Newark*, and in front of the pay-master's office, stretching in a line half-way down the berth-deck, the men were waiting to draw their little and big stacks of gold coin. The six-for-five men were hovering about, watching for their victims, and the friendlier borrowers and lenders were paying off and checking up. This was the day to figure out the amount of the allotment home, to plunge at the canteen, to wonder how four gold pieces were going to be stretched to five, to make stringent plans for next month.

Rebel Bryan was not in line. Pay-days never worried him, for money was a secondary consideration to Rebel. When the line thinned he would go down and draw his little stack of bright yellow disks, and do something with them that none of his shipmates dreamed of; for all but one went into a little registered package, and came at last to a town in Maryland, where they made a heart very glad.

And yet, this Rebel always had money. The envious ones said easy money, but that was because they did not understand. Rather let us say it was pleasant money, for from the one gold piece Rebel Bryan was able to skilfully make more, and during the process to get keen enjoyment, and mental exercise, and play for the imagination, for this wiry, small-statured, black-eyed magician was a poker player, and played a gentleman's game, without tricks, without marking the cards, for the sheer love of the clash of wits.

It was meet that he should have pay for his skill, just as any wizard gets pay, but no one who sat at his games was allowed to lose much, and even the cleverest contributed some, counting the experience worth it.

Through generations this game had come down to Rebel, the six uncles and the father who had fought with Stonewall Jackson had added their mites to its finesse, and back of them the soldiers and sailors of older campaigns had put on their sacred touch of honor. Despite the varied changes in the great game Rebel had inherited all.

On each pay-day there was a big all-night game in Ole Oleson's sail-room, at which the hatch was battened down and a lookout posted for Jimmy Legs. The best brains of the men forward, who recognized a quiet game of intense concentration, gathered to get the best of Rebel Bryan. Nevertheless, Rebel cheerfully outwitted them all, and so, not only on pay-day, but all the month, he had spending money.

Lest it be thought that there's a mystery about what he did with his other gold pieces, let it be known now, that he sent them to his black "Mammy," and since that fat black person lived at the "big house," and wasn't suffering for lack of food or raiment, the only other reason why he should send them to her was for luck, which he very solemnly did do, receiving in

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exchange sometimes a rabbit foot, or some Confederate money, or a batch of hand-made biscuits.

AS IF he performed a sacred rite, Rebel tore the wrapper from a new deck of cards, and passed them untouched to the man on his left. His eyes were those of a true sportsman—keen, smiling, observant, intent on winning, but cleanly.

"Go on and limber 'em up," said Neil Tufts. "We all know you won't thumb any aces."

Rebel looked at him swiftly. In his pure ethics, it was bad form to even talk of cheating, and yet to argue about it was worse, so Rebel said nothing, and took the cards. The others watched the supple play of his slim, strong fingers, as he shuffled the new deck, tossed them, cut them; always it seemed with new grace and quickness in each movement.

"Must have been swinging the single stick pretty lively since last month," said "Blondy" Brannon with admiration.

They all knew that Rebel kept his hands fit and his wrists limber with the wooden sword exercise.

"You-all mustn't carry on too much foolishness," admonished Rebel in his pleasant soft voice. "Old Jimmy Legs is a-snoopin' around tryin' to find where'bouts we hide this little pay-day game."

The men's voices hushed to a whisper. It was strictly and entirely against the rules to play poker for money, and the penny ante with the two-bit limit was as much a violation as a stiffer game. Rebel and his friends were comparatively safe in the sail-room, but it was best to be careful.

It was long past midnight when the game broke up, and Rebel Bryan was exactly five dollars and ten cents richer than when the game started. Of the six men below, each had contributed his share. Blondy Brannon, with his carefully hoarded big pay-day strapped to his leg, still had his roll intact, and Axel Peterson and Neil Tufts, recently reenlisted, had their big discharge money.

Blondy Brannon came up the ladder with Rebel as the men dispersed by twos. Safe on deck the two sat down on a sea-chest and lighted their pipes.

"You heard the talk," said Brannon, "what would you do?"

"Sounds kinda mysterious," said Rebel. "Countin' Tuffy and the Swede, that's three of our boys who've been robbed when they were paid off and started home carryin' a big wad."

"I'm next," said Brannon. "I go to-morrow, and I wonder if I'll show up in about two days just as Neil Tufts and Axel Peterson did, cleaned out, and wanting to reenlist to get the three months' pay?"

"They both got flim-flammed all right," drawled Rebel, "but what're you aimin' to to with your money? Looks like to me that all three of these fellows bit into their pet hobby, and found a rotten speck."

Blondy Brannon hesitated. What he wanted to do was close to his heart. Rebel Bryan waited, and in a moment his companion started in, trying to keep his voice light and his tone steady.

"I'm a twin," he said, "but the other fellow can't walk, except a few steps at a time. He's been in a wheel-chair for nine years. This money goes to get him a little gas wagon with a self-starter."

Rebel knocked his pipe softly against the chest before he spoke, all the banter gone from his voice.

"What's the matter with one of these bank drafts," he suggested.

"He wouldn't take it. He'd want to buy something for somebody else. I'll have to get home with the money, buy the auto, and then the thing will be past arguing. That brother could tell me fifty reasons why I ought to spend it on myself."

"Well," said Rebel, "let's see what happened to the Swede and Tuffy, from what they told us tonight.

"The Swede was keen for land, and after he's looked over the whole lay he buys some out in California—orange land. Here's what it said." Rebel read from a pamphlet: "'Within two miles of center of prosperous city of ten thousand—plenty of water—price of groves in bearing—and this choice ten-acre tract only two hundred dollars per acre—terms to suit purchaser.'"

"And the place was down in a hole which the natives called the Wash, full of boulders as big as barrels, and in the Winter a roaring torrent," interrupted Brannon, smiling at his recollection of Peterson's story. "But the Swede was game," he mimicked, "'I bane come back to catch that faller.'"

"But the land-office was closed," continued Rebel. "Now Tuffy was going to

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buy an automobile, and you know what happened to him. Back home where you know the folks, nobody will sell you a machine, take you out and teach you how to run it, and then hit you with a slingshot, and take the machine back."

"And I'm not going to hit up the get-rich-quick movie stuff as Benson did, and get stung for my roll. It begins to look as if the three just played in three kinds of bad luck, and that there's nothing in there being a jinx on the men who leave this ship with a big wad of money."

"Just the same," said Rebel soberly, "I repeat the offer I made down below. What's the use taking chances? When you get the rest of your money out of the ship's bank in the morning, and sign clear for sure, you give me that money, the whole wad, and I'll go along with you until we get it home. I'm due for a week's liberty any time I ask for it."

"Do you really think——"

"No," said Rebel, "but I feel. I've got an old black mammy down in Maryland, and she taught me how. You do it, and we'll get that money home. Otherwise, there's no telling what'll happen."

Brannon agreed at once, and was doubly glad the next day when he signed clear, that he was to have help in the custody of the money, for the paymaster did not return to the ship until late, and after many trivial delays it was almost dark when the two men started through the Navy Yard gate.

"Supper first," announced Rebel, who was carrying the money. "Our train doesn't get away for two hours yet."

"Could have made the early one, if that paymaster's yeoman Leon Masson hadn't monkeyed around so long with us. I don't like that fellow, Rebel. Ole's been hinting to invite him to our little poker games here lately."

"He's a friend of Ole's," said Rebel. "Did he have anything to say tonight when you were getting away?"

"Nothing except that he tried to kid me about getting robbed, so I told him what we were going to do."

"That's good," said Rebel, "and I hope it fixed him."

Brannon looked at his companion a little puzzled. Rebel seemed to mean more than he said.

After supper, on the way to a picture show, whose outside posters looked attractive, Rebel bought a slim strong cane, for Rebel's second passion was for the single-stick, and whirling a cane came next best to that. On every liberty Rebel carried a cane, whirling it, striking at stones and weeds in the country, thrusting at cement and tree-boxes in the city.

As the two sailors came from the picture show, two men were loitering in the shadow beside the entrance. The same two men who had entered the restaurant behind them. Rebel saw them, but said nothing to Brannon, and even when he suggested that they walk to the railroad station, Rebel did not object.

"I'm glad you're along," said Brannon, when the brightly lighted streets gave way to dark blocks of warehouses, and the black mouths of narrow alleys.

The two stepped brisker. The place was ideal for a hold-up.

"If I'd known it was as bad as this, we'd have taken some kind of ride."

"Get in the middle of the street," advised Rebel.

The attack came at the next alley. A man stumbled toward the two sailors and asked for the price of a drink. Brannon and Rebel refused, and started on, but at the same moment a voice behind them demanded that they stop, and the man before them became sober and menacing.

"What d'you want?" asked Rebel meekly. "We're on the way back to the ship, and we're broke."

The man who had come up behind laughed harshly.

"Quit your kiddin'," he said contemptuously, then spoke to his companion. "Go through 'em, Bill. This feller here's the one with the roll," and he indicated Rebel with the barrel of the ugly automatic, which had covered the two sailors from the beginning. "Try his left leg for the belt, and I'll hold the gun on 'em."

KEEPING his revolver ready, the man who had played drunk advanced. Rebel's cane was leaning against his body, and his hands were in the air as had been directed. The man with the gun stood a little to one side, and as all good poker players should do, Rebel was watching his eyes. Blondy Brannon seemed stunned, and so far had said nothing. Now he blurted out.

"I've got all the money. Here, take it,

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and let us go. It's in the pants pocket."

"Don't worry, son," said the man. "We know who's carryin' the big dough, and we'll attend to yours later."

A self-satisfied wave of amusement crossed his face, and for an instant his whole attention was centered on Brannon. This was Rebel Bryan's chance. In the shadow his right hand swooped down and caught the stick, and in the same swing it came whistling upward to strike the wrist that held the gun. It was a clean hit, exactly on the wrist-joint, paralyzing the nerves and muscles. The surprised man swore with the pain as the gun fell from numbed fingers.

"Quick, Brannon!" cried Rebel. "Get that gun!" And he turned his cane on the other man who had jumped back to draw his weapon.

The gun was half out when Rebel leaped, but the end of the cane found the man's fingers. As in poker, Rebel knew all the tricks of this game, and his aim was perfect. Withdrawing his injured hand, the thug snatched at the pistol with his other hand, but Rebel's cane again found its mark, and this hand too, caught the full force of the sailor's weapon.

With both hands bleeding and fingers broken, Bill charged head down, cursing with rage and pain, and Rebel dodged backward, while the gun slipped to the pavement unheeded. There was no good in breaking the frail stick over the man's bullet-head, so Rebel waited for a chance to strike where he wished.

Blondy Brannon was struggling with the first man. As he stooped to get the gun, the thug jumped on his shoulders, and the two had gone down in a squirming heap to the street. Brannon was broad of shoulder, and thick of chest, but the man's initial advantage of hold was against him. Also the thug seemed to know something of wrestling, while Brannon knew very little. His hands were full, but he managed to keep his man from the gun, and to hold his own, while the thug's labored breathing told him that the victory would be his in time.

As he fought, he wondered how Rebel was getting along, who was matched with a man larger if anything, than his own antagonist; who was small of stature, counted too light to pull anything but a bow oar, and who had more than five hundred dollars strapped to his leg.

But Brannon need not have worried about his friend. Rebel fought with a weapon which Bill, the thug, had never seen used, and knew nothing about, and since it was unknown and another man's game, he despised. Three times Rebel dodged the bull-like rushes, managing to kick the gun into the gutter as well, and then unexpectedly stood fast, thrusting swiftly with the stick, as if he used a sword. The ferruled end struck squarely on Bill's thick neck, and his rush stopped with a grunt of pain. Instinctively he grabbed upward with his hands, but the stick was too quick for him, and was away and had found an exceedingly tender place on the elbow of one of his raised arms.

Bill dropped the arms quickly, intending to rush again and corner this tormentor, but again Rebel did not dodge, did not wait for the other's charge. As Bill's arms dropped, he stepped quickly forward, the cane whizzed upward with all the power of his supple wrist and arm, with all the skill of his wire-like trained muscles, and fell as a scorching flame of fury across his antagonist's eyes.

Blinded, the bridge of his nose broken, Bill fell backward, out of the fight, and groped toward the alley from which he had come. Rebel retrieved one gun from the reach of Brannon's man, and stooped to get the other from the gutter. He failed to see the third man dart out from the mouth of the alley.

Brannon was temporarily on the bottom, and squeezing with all the power of his gorilla arms to hasten the panting breaths of the man on top of him. His warning cry to Rebel came too late. A blow from a leaded club, as he bent over searching, and Rebel went down quietly and lay still, while this third man took out a knife, slit his trousers leg, and cut away the bulging money-belt from his left leg.

"Stop thief!" yelled Brannon, with all the breath he could spare, and as the words were repeated, the man stuffed the belt in his pocket and ran off down the street.

As he disappeared, a policeman came running from the opposite direction, and Brannon knew why the man had abandoned his companion.

"Why wasn't you five minutes sooner?" groaned Brannon. "They've knocked out my shipmate and taken the money."

"Money!" muttered the policeman.

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"How much? Four dollars and a handful of beer checks? You and this pal of yours ought to figure you're lucky that they didn't croak one of you."

"Maybe they did," answered Brannon disgustedly.

The policman was handcuffing the footpad, and he went over to see about Rebel. He found him sitting up, rubbing the back of his head ruefully.

"I tried to warn you," said Brannon. "How're you feeling?"

"Poco punko," said Rebel dizzily, and felt of his leg where the money-belt had been.

"No use," said Brannon in dejection. "I saw him take it."

"Went right to it like he knew where to look," added Rebel, smiling cheerfully.

Brannon looked at him with a puzzled frown.

"Cheer up, old pal," exclaimed Rebel, clapping his friend on the back. "I know it's your money, but I know, too, that a certain bold highwayman has a surprise coming."

The mystified but hopeful Brannon kept his tongue until the two sailors were dismissed at the nearest police-station, and the thug locked up. As they came outside, Rebel called a city taxi.

"To the H. & Q. Station," he ordered, and turned with a grin to Brannon. "There's still time to catch that train, and I'll tell you about it as we ride."

"Then you've still got the money?" asked Brannon, unable to believe.

"When I went out of the movie to get a smoke, and was gone until you began to get worried," continued Rebel, "I slipped into the night-and-day bank next door—I picked that movie on purpose—and bought a draft with your money and in your name. Then I took a bunch of Confederate bills, with a couple of ones on the outside, and put it in the belt. That's what our fine bunch of crooks captured." Rebel pulled a slip of paper from his hat. "Here's the draft," he said. "You've got enough small change on you to get home, and you can cash this where you're known."

"And you had it in your flat cap all the time!" exclaimed the joyful Brannon.

"Sure," said Rebel. "That bunch was looking for a fat leg-belt, and even if they'd found this, it wouldn't have been any good to them."

"Then why in the name of old Ned did you put up a scrap when we were jumped, and why didn't you tell——"

"All in good time," soothed Rebel. The two had reached the station. "Don't be worrying," he told Brannon, as the two shook hands. "All of this night's doin's was for a purpose. You run along and buy that joy-wagon for the brother, and we'll see what we'll see when you get back."

"All right," said Brannon, noting a certain poker expression of Rebel's, which he knew to mean that no more information was coming. "Take good care of Rebel."

Rebel smiled with the same inscrutable poker face, and waved as the train pulled out. Then he went back to the Navy Yard as fast as a taxi would take him, mysteriously resurrecting a carefully folded bill from an inner pocket to pay the driver.

Inside the gate he found a seat on a bench in the little park, which gave him a view of everybody that came in, and waited patiently for an hour. It was a fine Summer night, and Rebel liked to look at the stars and dream. He was afraid to light his pipe, for fear of being routed out by a marine, but toward the close of the hour the figure that he waited for came through the gate, and crouching down beside a pyramid of cannon-balls, he let the man pass, then moved along behind him noisily, as if he had just come through the gate.

"Hello," called Rebel when the two were almost to the *Newark*. "What's your hurry?"

ALMOST impatiently the man before him turned, and waited while Rebel came up. It was Leon Mosser, the paymaster's yeoman, and since he had heard Rebel behind him, had been quickening his steps until he was hailed.

"I thought it was you," said Rebel. "What you doin' out so late?"

In the dark Rebel thought he could see the man start, as his voice was recognized.

"I might ask the same of you," evaded the yeoman.

"Well, I don't mind," said Rebel. "I've been seeing a shipmate off. Blondy Brannon's gone home to buy a gas-buggy."

Mosser seemed to be waiting for additional detail, but Rebel changed the subject abruptly, to Mosser's apparent relief.

"Now Brannon's gone, what do you say you take a little hand in the poker game?

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That's what I wanted to ask you when I held you up. The boys are saying you play a tight hand."

Mosser was surprised. He had hinted at the poker game several times, but had found his overtures received coldly.

"I'd be glad to take a hand," he said quickly.

Rebel dropped his voice to a confidential tone.

"Say, Mosser, I've been hearing of a big game ashore, and now and then I like to do a little plunging. Could you put me next? Maybe that's where you've been."

"I think I could," promised the other, ignoring part of Rebel's question.

"If money's any object," continued Rebel boastfully, "I know where I can lay my hands on five hundred any time I want to draw a check."

The two had reached the ship, and the conversation ended, but at the next poker game in Ole Oleson's sail-locker, Mosser was on hand and won five dollars. Rebel played rather stupidly, and Mosser did not exert himself, although all the crowd felt that he had a better game than he showed. On the second night after the game, Mosser had a proposition for Rebel.

"I know something better than this," he confided. "There's a fellow over on the guardo who thinks he's a shark at this game. He's got money too. What do you say we quit this child's play, go ashore somewhere and have a real set-to?"

"I'm with you," agreed Rebel, and two nights later Mosser summoned him.

The yeoman led the way to an up-stairs room in the city.

"Where's the fellow from the guardo?" Rebel asked in an undertone.

He and Mosser appeared to be the only ones among the five men who were sailors.

"The big fellow," whispered Mosser. "I'll introduce you all around. He wears cits when he's ashore."

The night passed uneventfully, and Rebel won a small amount, but a week later Mosser again whispered to Rebel:

"Get all your money ready. The big killing breaks day after tomorrow night."

With little delay the five men sat down to play, and as a matter of courtesy, a new deck was handed to Rebel. As he opened the package and began to shuffle the cards, the man from the guardo, whom the others called Skippy, was talking.

"This here game's no small fry, nickel and dime pastime. Here's my roll, and I want to see the color of the money on the rest of you guys."

As he spoke he produced a thick roll of bills with a twenty on the cover.

"There's yellower ones than that inside," he boasted, as he took off the rubber band.

"Show up!" whispered Mosser, as he took out his money, and Rebel unbuckled his leg-belt and spread out ten fifties. All the others were doing the same.

"The roof's the limit," said Skippy. "I'm out to make a cleanin' or go broke."

Then Rebel began to play. In half an hour he had won a hundred dollars, and had caught a kick under the table meant for some one else, a wink from Skippy to Mosser, which made the yeoman quit betting, and had seen one of the men skilfully mark an ace.

"Let's have a new deck," demanded one of the losers. "These birds are hoodooed for me."

Skippy himself went to a drawer and returned with the package. Rebel's keen eyes saw that the seals had been broken and reglued, and knew that the pack was marked, and that the time for the killing had arrived. These fellows certainly didn't intend to waste much time.

The betting started with new liveliness. Rebel lost his hundred on the first hand, and went to the sink behind the screen to get a drink of water. There was a door behind the screen, and he turned the key softly. When he returned the hands had been dealt.

"I'd prefer to have a new deal," he announced, but was overruled. He had a splendid hand, and began to play it strongly. The others had strong hands, too. Soon the table was covered with money, but one by one the men dropped out and finally Skippy and Rebel were facing each other across the pile of it.

"I call," said Rebel finally, and put the last of his roll and another fifty from his hat-band in the center of the table.

Skippy promptly borrowed from the man on his left, and covered. Then he spread out his hand.

"Beat that!" he demanded.

Rebel already knew that Skippy had the best hand. He could read the backs of this marked deck as readily as the faces. He knew what cards had been dealt to each man.

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SLOWLY he spread his hand on the table, and all the others breathed deeply with relief. They knew his wizardry with cards, and this had been a tense moment. Somehow, perhaps he might have been able to outwit them.

"You seem to have the best hand," he said to Skippy, and then his voice changing from its quiet drawl to a sharp decisiveness, "but the pot is mine because the cards were marked."

Skippy's cry of derision was cut short by a sharp command from behind the screen. They all turned, while Rebel stuffed the pile of money into his loose blouse.

"Don't try to start anything," said Neil Tufts, the automatic he presented pointing steadily at Skippy's breast. Beside him were Axel Peterson, Benson, and Blondy Brannon. Each had his man covered.

"These fellows have a word or two to say while I get the pot," drawled Rebel.

"You bet," said Peterson, "I tank one feller what sold me land."

"And the movie actor," said Benson.

"This Skippy is the one that turned the automobile trick," added Neil Tufts. "I think I'll crack him one for old time's sake."

The three accused men turned on Leon Mosser.

"What kind of a frame-up is this?" demanded Skippy.

Rebel answered him.

"Don't blame your friend. He tried to do his bit on the square by you crooks. He brought me here with my nice little roll, and my pet hobby, according to contract. But there was a frame-up. We tumbled to Mosser's little game some time ago, and planned to get our money back all at one play. This is the night. Forward, march, the whole works now until we find a policeman."

"You can't prove that I had a hand in this thing," defied Mosser. "I don't know a thing about what you are talking."

"Your memory is a good forgetter," said Rebel. "Wait a minute until we ease this crook's mind."

He turned to Mosser and made him drop his eyes as his own flashing jet-black ones hardened.

"Listen to me," he said wrathfully. "You're the one that's the worst of the bunch. You betrayed your shipmates. You put the land scheme under Peterson's nose. You recommended the second-hand auto store. You introduced the movie promoter. You're the eyes of this gang, and pointed out the big pay-day men, and told the others how to do the trick. But you fell down with Blondy. You made the play too strong. When he told you that I was to carry the money, the attack came direct to me. You are the only one that Blondy did tell."

"He's got you, Le," said Skippy.

"Then this," continued Rebel. "You followed Blondy and me ashore that night, and when we were about to get the best of your pals you took a hand, hitting from behind, and ruining a good suit of blues for me by cutting the leg. I don't mind your getting the Confederate money, though it's too good for you, but you ran off and left your pal to be arrested, when a clip over the head for Brannon, the same as me, would have let him get away."

"There's still little evidence," defied Mosser.

"You got away as quick as you could, because you were afraid Brannon would recognize you," went on Rebel, not seeming to notice the other's words, "and you thought you were safe, but when you pulled out your knife to slit the leg of my pants to get at the money, you hauled out something else. Here it is. I found it on the ground when I was looking for my hat."

Rebel produced a common rubber stencil used only in the paymaster's office. It had Mosser's initials on the handle.

"I'll just keep it," he said. "You're not going to need it any more. And for the benefit of all hands, I calculate that there's enough cash in this pot I'm carrying in my blouse to pay up the most of what's due Tuffy, Peterson and Benson. Come on, everybody, and we'll get this over, but crooks ought to cut out playing poker, it's a gentleman's game, and brings the other kind nothing but bad luck."

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THE WAYS of MOUNTAIN MEN

by HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "The Raven Mocker," "Red Sticks," etc.

THE September wind was blowing open the sunflowers, and Little Matt and Big Rusty knew it was time for their Omaha companions to end the Summer hunt and return to their earthen lodges on the Elkhorn. The hunting party was composed of the Hanga, or Buffalo gens, and their medicine had been strong, and much dried meat was ready for Winter consumption. The sacred pole in the sacred tent had been greased with fitting ceremonies and due thanks returned to Wakanda.

But although there was much rejoicing over the success of the hunt the two white men noted a mournful undertone. Throughout the Summer the lodges had been pitched on the open plain, allowing the family life of the Buffalo people to find its most joyous expression. With the coming of Winter and the quest for beaver and otter there could be no camping on the prairie, but each family must seek a sheltered place in the hills and forego companionship.

Winter, also, was a yearly tragedy. By greasing the sacred pole the Buffalo people were supposed to be insured against deep snows; and yet Wakanda, so eccentric in his favors, sometimes overlooked this propitiatory act and smothered the faithful in a wrath of snow that froze the bronze limbs into granite hardness.

Little Matt and Big Rusty, typical mountain trappers, wilder in appearance than their Indian friends, bewhiskered tatterdemalions of humanity, were all eagerness to exchange the placid Summer's work for the desperate gamble for existence to be undergone during the next few months. They had joined the Omahas on the Elkhorn in early Summer, when the latter had finished planting their corn and pumpkins and cutting the weeds preparatory to the big hunt. They had represented themselves as hunters, and throughout the season had been of great service.

The Omahas expected them to return to the Elkhorn for the Winter, or to continue down the Missouri to the settlements. Did the Indians suspect they had traps and supplies cached in the mountains, and purposed proceeding thither for beaver, their plans would have been discouraged with a war-club. For already, although it was but the year 1833, the Western Indians were beginning to fear there was not enough peltry for both red and white.

Big Rusty, so-called because of his giant physique and flaming red hair and beard, was as simple and direct of purpose as a child. He was for defying all the plains tribes and making straight for the Medicine Bow Mountains where they had cached their traps the Spring before. Little Matt, possessing the cunning of a weasel, was the brains of the partnership. He had insisted on joining the Omahas and taking advantage of their company to lay in a stock of dried meat while waiting for the beaver's fur to get prime.

This had been done and now it only remained for them to slip away some night and strike for the hills. The Omahas, eager to return home and make ready for the Winter hunt, would not pursue them far even if suspecting their purpose. Once

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before the couple had worked the same game among the Oglala Sioux.

"What do they keep in that danged sacred bag o' theirs?" asked Rusty, as the two loafed near one of the two sacred tents.

Little Matt scowled impatiently as he retorted:

"That bag seems to be on yer mind. There ain't nothin' in it but some feathers, mebbe a clam-shell an' some terbaccer. They're fussy about lettin' white folks peek into it."

"How do ye know but what there's gold, or a—a di'mon' in it?" asked Rusty.

"Ye big, red-headed fool!" exploded Matt.

"Wal, I once seen a piece o' gold quartz, what was took from a medicine-bag of a dead Sioux. Allers believed he found it in th' Black Hills. Goin' to look that ground over sometime. An' if they can find gold there, why not di'mon's?"

"Yah-h!" snarled Little Matt, never able to abide his partner's obsession that articles of great value might be found in the jealously guarded medicine-bags of the Indians. "Keep yer big trap shet. Here comes Standin' Swan, keeper o' that same bag."

"Ye're a liar. Yaller Smoke is callin' him back to th' tent. Now, Yaller's comin'."

"Somethin's gone wrong," mumbled Matt, his sharp gaze detecting a furtive expression of concern on the face of the chief, Yellow Smoke, who with Flying Crow had charge of the season's hunt.

Yellow Smoke would have avoided them had not Matt stepped before him, saying—

"We have made medicine to Wakanda for the meat he has given our brothers, the Omahas."

"*Haul Kagehal*" grunted Yellow Smoke, hastening on his way.

"Says 'Thanks,' my friend,' but shoves right along," mused Matt.

"Prob'ly Flyin' Crow's goin' to boil, (give a feast)" lazily observed Rusty.

"Yaller Smoke ain't no messenger. If he boils we'll be asked."

"I'll be there if there's any eatin'," heartily assured Rusty.

"Yaller Smoke's got somethin' on his mind what worries him. I'll shove 'round this side, ye go t'other. Mebbe we can strike a trail. It's nice f'r him to say '*Haul Kagehal*' but I want to know why he shoved by like that."

If Big Rusty shared his friend's curiosity he forgot the fact once he glimpsed Standing Swan, the keeper of the sacred bag. With the imagination and credulity of a juvenile he had repeatedly filled the bag with rare treasure, ranging from a quart of lightning-whisky to gold and diamonds. Of the latter he had but vague notions, except that they were pretty and worth several drunks apiece. He was still staring at Standing Swan, oblivious of the several subchiefs and noted warriors hurrying to the sacred tent, when a violent punch in the ribs aroused him from his meditations.

"Wake up!" growled Little Matt. "Big war-party o' Dakotas comin'. Scout got in last night, badly wounded an' reported to Flyin' Crow. Three other scouts was wiped out. One of 'em was the Crow's son. They're goin' to pow-wow on what to do. Hope they don't know 'bout our bein' with th' Dakotas that Summer, or they'll think we're bad medicine. If we ain't asked to th' talk it'll look bad."

Big Rusty glanced toward their horses, lean, ugly brutes, but Matt cut in—

"We can't make a break till dark."

"How far off be th' Dakotas?"

"Several sleeps, or th' Omahas would be packin' off their women an' younkers to th' Elkhorn. Huh! Mebbe there ain't nothin' to git het up over, for here comes a *wanace*."

The *wanace*, or camp policeman, painted black and carrying a whip, hurried up to them, proclaiming:

"Ho, friends! They say there is to be a council. They say the white men, the Little Hunter and the Big Bull, are wanted in the sacred tent."

"Reckon everything's all right," murmured Matt as they followed the *wanace*.

"Mebbe they'll trot out that sacred bag so's we can sort o' size it up," hopefully remarked Rusty.

THE *wanace* led them into the sacred tent where they passed 'round the circle of squatting warriors, following the direction of the sun, and took the guests' places at the back of the tent and opposite the opening. In the middle of the tent simmered a kettle of meat. Fastened to the crotched sticks supporting the kettle were small bundles of dry grass. Near the fire were a quantity of wooden bowls.

This culinary arrangement told a vivid story to the trappers, although Big Rusty

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largely gave his attention to the keeper of the sacred bag. This warrior wore a robe fastened at the neck and drawn closely about him, as was his duty to do when the bag was being consecrated to the thunder, or war god. Rusty was trying to guess what was in the bag; Little Matt only remembered it was never thus carried by a muffled figure except when a big war-party was contemplated.

Little Matt, cursing his friend's dangerous curiosity, dug him in the ribs and hissed—

"Nothin' in it but some feathers."

The big trapper did not hear him, and his gaze glowed with yellow lights as the Swan touched the bag as it hung from the sacred pole, and began chanting:

"As my grandfather is dangerous,
As my grandfather is dangerous,
When he brandishes his club,
Dangerous——"

He broke off abruptly, the remainder of the chant being too sacred for profane ears.

Yellow Smoke, who sat beside Flying Crow, raised a hand, and a crier loudly announced:

"They say one of our young warriors returned after seeing a large band of Dakotas coming to fight us. They say you must make a hiding-place for the women and children. The Dakotas will surely come. They say you must do your best. They say the white men, Little Hunter and the Big Bull, will help their red brothers."

With the business thus formally introduced before the council all eyes were turned on the trappers. Little Matt knew there must be no hesitation, and leaping to his feet he brandished his light ax, and cried—

"Oh, War-Chiefs; I will kill one."

With no notions of finesse, and simply eager to follow the martial example of his partner, Big Rusty sprang up, his towering bulk bringing a glitter of admiration to the savage eyes. Shaking his massive red head, in a bull-like rumble he boasted—

"Oh, War-Chiefs, I will burn the grass when I come back."

The stout spirit of the whites was contagious, and Yellow Smoke came to his feet, filled with a sudden lust for battle. Shaking his war-club he cried after the manner of his people when recording bold promises:

"Ho, ye clumps of buffalo grass, and tall trees, I tell you and send my voice that ye may hear it. The Little Hunter says he will run among the Dakotas and kill a very swift man, halloo! Ho, ye birds of all kinds, ye small and big animals, I send my voice that ye may hear it, halloo! The Big Bull says he will go on a war-path. He says he will set fire to the grass to show he is bringing back scalps, halloo!"

As he sat down two young warriors filled the bowls with meat from the kettle and passed them 'round. After the food had been bolted the bunches of dry grass were passed and the bowls wiped clean. Then the grass was thrown on the fire, causing a thick smoke. The warriors and trappers thrust their bowls into the smoke, clashing them together so as to make a great confusion, each calling on Wakanda to hold him steadfast in the trial to come. As the din ceased and the stifling smoke partly escaped through the top of the tent Big Rusty growled—

"Now, th' hellibaloo's over an' we've said what we'll do, why don't they say what they'll do?"

"It's comin'," whispered Little Matt.

For a moment there was a tense silence, then Flying Crow, elder of the two chiefs, slowly rose and told how three scouts, one being his own son, had been slain by a large party of Dakotas. The fourth scout although badly wounded, had managed to escape. Pausing, he took the sacred pipe from the keeper of the bag and filled and lighted it. Then he fiercely demanded—

"Who will fight against the Dakotas put that pipe to his lips!"

The pipe was passed with none refusing to smoke it, although there were some who preferred a hasty retreat to the Elkhorn. As yet the council had determined on no course of action except that the camp would fight. Receiving back the pipe the keeper of the bag monotonously chanted—

"As my grandfather is dangerous,
As my grandfather is dangerous,
When he brandishes his club,
Dangerous——"

"Dangerous, nothin'!" growled Big Rusty. "I ain't goin' to be mixed up in no fight jest f'r th' sake o' bein' hitched to a stake an' turned over to th' squaws o' th' Dakotas. Let's know what's th' game afore we draw any more keerds."

Little Matt rose and gravely informed the council that while he and his friend were the

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favorite children of Wakanda and loved to fight, their medicine prevented them from making defensive warfare.

"Ho, War-Chiefs, listen to my voice coming to ye," he concluded. "The Big Bull and the Little Hunter will take the war-path against the Dakotas, but they will not wait to be attacked here. If the Omahas are ready to set out tonight and surprise the foe, let the chiefs make presents to Standing Swan the bearer of the sacred bag, and then tie the medicine grass about their wrists and ankles and heads to please the thunder god, and the white hunters will go with them."

As he finished he dipped broth from the kettle and poured it outside the entrance as an offering to the ghosts.

Realizing the possible advantage of a surprise attack, especially since they were outnumbered, the warriors assented, and duly made their boasts as to what they would accomplish. Some vowed they would be the first to lay hands on the enemy, thus winning the right to blacken their bodies and "wear the crow" in their belts; others that they would disembowel the foe with their knives, thus obtaining the privilege of reddening their blades and dancing like grizzly bears; and so on through the category of savage ambitions.

AS THEY rode from the camp the old men shouted after them:

"Do your best. You have gone traveling because you are men. You are walking over a land which is very pleasant to walk. Be sure to lie (die) with your face to the foe."

And the women chanted their song for departing warriors, which concluded with the exhortation—

"Be returning quickly with a young Dakota."

"I'll be returnin' with that medicine bag," muttered Big Rusty in his flaming beard as he rode closer to the bearer of the bag.

"None o' that!" sharply rebuked Little Matt. "See what happened to Long Moses after he lifted th' Flat Pipe o' th' 'Rapaho. Died o' smallpox on th' Yallerstone."

"Th' danged fool camped with a band o' Mandans what had it," snorted Rusty.

"He wouldn't 'a' gone to 'em if he'd kept his paws off'n that pipe. I tell ye that bag don't hold nothin' what's worth a cuss."

"Ye can't say on yer alferdavit what's in it. Ye never peeked into it," growled Rusty.

"Yer skull's thicker'n a ol' bull's," groaned Matt. "Ye talk like a child when we've got a bad scrimmage on our hands. These reds will run if either o' their chiefs is wiped out. It's up to you an' me to wipe out some Dakotas at long range an' take th' fightin' speerit out of 'em, not to be thinkin' of medicine bags."

"I'm ready to fight, Runty. But I don't notion a long-range fight. I like to feel my man."

"Ye'll feel th' whole Sioux nation in yer ha'r if ye don't do as I say."

"Mebbe there'll be 'nough fightin' to give us all kinds," Rusty hopefully retorted.

That night the band camped in a fringe of cottonwood bordering a shallow creek. Early in the morning the *wanaces* awakened the warriors, saying a scout was in to report two hundred Dakotas encamped a few miles to the north. The keeper of the sacred bag at once advanced to the bank of the creek and opened the bag four times, holding the mouth toward the enemy. Big Rusty was at his elbow when the ceremony was performed, and endeavored to glimpse the contents of the receptacle. Standing Swan cried out in a great rage and raised his club just as several camp policemen rushed up and pulled the giant away.

Little Matt, who had been keeping anxious tabs on his friend, interposed and insisted his mate was merely getting a drink of water and had had no intention of interfering with the tribal medicine. The arrival of a second scout, his pony in a lather, eased the situation for the time being, although the keeper glared murderously after the two.

The second scout reported the enemy were breaking camp. He verified the first scout's estimate of their numbers. As there were but sixty in the Omaha party, Yellow Smoke and Flying Crow drew aside to consult their medicine. Some of the warriors began advising a withdrawal and the throwing up of an entrenchment at their camp.

Little Matt feared a panic would result. With the enemy so near, a retreat would be suicidal. And there were several among the Dakotas who had vowed they would have his and Rusty's hair. Matt hastened to the chiefs and learned Yellow Smoke was for retreating, while Flying Crow, hot for

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revenge, was for giving battle where they stood.

Neither plan appealed to the hunter.

"What if they do outnumber us," he scoffed. "Men do not count where Wakanda is."

And he repeated a bit of a very ancient song, sung at the Scalp Dance—

"Wakanda having said that I shall not be,
I shall not be."

Which was always interpreted to mean a man would live until it came time for him to die, no matter what danger threatened.

"*Hau! Kagehal*" grunted Flying Crow. "We are Wakanda's warriors. We have opened the medicine bag against them. What would my little brother do?"

"Wakanda makes us wise men. Listen to my medicine. I will ride ahead with the Big Bull. The Dakotas will attack us and we will make a running fight and lead them here where the Omahas will take them by surprise and break off many heads."

"Ho! Little Hunter speaks in the words of Wakanda. It is good," cried Flying Crow.

"THEY'RE jest beyond th' next rise," said Little Matt.

Big Rusty nodded cheerfully. So long as they were not captured alive he always welcomed a battle. Little Matt leaped from his horse and examined its feet to give the impression to spying eyes that his mount had gone lame.

Big Rusty swept his gaze along the skyline, and warned—

"Here they come!"

Little Matt climbed into the high saddle and rapidly counted the yelling braves now streaming over the rise. He exclaimed in disgust as he counted but fifty.

"We've got to stand 'em off till th' rest catch up. Try f'r th' tall sucker on th' right."

The "tall sucker" was a war-chief of renown, as he carried the pipe for the Dakotas, riding some distance ahead. Big Rusty's rifle barked spitefully and the pony went down.

"Undershot!" cried Little Matt.

"Ye're a liar! His hoss threw up his head," snarled Rusty.

Little Matt fired just as the chief disentangled himself from the pony. The chief pitched forward and remained quiet. Big Rusty fired again and another pony went down. The rider rolled clear and began running to the rear. He was nearly out of range when Matt finished reloading and dropped him.

"Ye little runt! Ye keep yer lead off'n my Injuns," cried Rusty.

"They're spreadin' out to surround us," warned Matt, watching the two diverging lines warily.

"An' I've stood all this —— foolishness I'm goin' to," howled Rusty.

He would have charged had not his companion seized the bridle and whirled his horse about.

Fuming and cursing Rusty cantered after his friend till they topped a low sand ridge, where they halted. The Dakotas, riding in two long files, were still intent on encircling them. The leader of one file wheeled aside and halted, and stood erect on his pony. Big Rusty covered him, but Matt expostulated:

"Let him give his signal first. He's usin' his hand. Th' rest must be close or he'd use his robe."

The Indian, facing the rear, lifted his hand high above his head and swung it downward to his side several times in the signal for, "Come quick."

Big Rusty growled—

"My friend, I reckon that'll do," and fired.

The man dropped as though stricken by lightning.

With howls of rage the Dakotas opened fire, their lead falling short or going wild. Matt dropped a pony, much to Rusty's delight. Then the onward rush of the band evidenced reinforcements were about to top the rise. As the fresh line of heads appeared above the abbreviated sky-line the trappers quickened their retreat. Now that the full force of the Dakotas was pounding after them the trappers made no further stand, but took turns in firing while at a gallop.

A bobbing horse is a difficult target, especially when the marksman also is mounted, and it was largely by luck that several ponies and two braves were put out of the fight. Far ahead a dark streak advertised the fringe of cottonwood where the Omahas lay in ambush. For nearly an hour the trappers spurred on, keeping just beyond accurate range. The Indians, hoping to ride them down before they could reach

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shelter, plied their quirts and crept closer. Now the creek opened up, and in a few minutes the trappers were taking the water in a final spurt, their pursuers dangerously close.

As the white men rode through the trees and wheeled about, the Dakotas struck the creek in a compact body. A sheet of flame and a shower of arrows, punctuated by the wild war-cry of the Omahas, came as a complete surprise. With howls of consternation the Dakotas swerved about, leaving their dead and wounded.

Led by Big Rusty and the two chiefs the Buffalo men swarmed across the creek. Little Matt hovered on the flank, using his rifle and two long horse-pistols with deadly effect. Big Rusty wielded a war-club in each hand, and his huge figure and roaring voice sent a great fear among the already demoralized Dakotas; and wherever the oriflamme of his long hair rose above the press there the enemy fell back.

The Omahas inspired by his Jovian wrath fought most valiantly, and inside of five minutes the enemy developed a panic. Imagining the odds were against them they rapidly gave ground and began to disintegrate. Then a lance-thrust ripped open the throat of Flying Crow. His slayer dropped dead under Rusty's club before he could proclaim his coup. When it became known their chief was dead the Omahas ceased fighting, but the Dakotas were now in full retreat, racing in scattered bands across the undulating prairie.

Gathering up their dead and wounded the Omahas returned to the grove. Yellow Smoke threw a robe over the dead chief, and sententiously announced:

"Wakanda has spoken. We must go back to the camp."

Flying Crow's death robbed the victory of its savor. The Dakotas had been routed, but the Omahas knew they would recover their morale, and with fresh reinforcements return for revenge. However, there would be time for the safe removal of the camp to the Elkhorn.

"The Big Bull and I will ride ahead and tell them to be ready for a night march," volunteered Little Matt.

To his dismay Standing Swan thrust a war-club in his face, and accused—

"The Big Bull spoiled the medicine of the bag when it was being opened four times."

"He did not," hotly replied Matt. "He went to the creek to drink. Is the medicine of the Omahas so weak, a friend's head can stop it? Yellow Smoke laughs at such talk."

"Flying Crow is dead. Something bad killed him," ominously observed Yellow Smoke.

The veiled hostility of his words elicited a chorus of guttural endorsement.

Big Rusty threw back his head and in a mighty roar of rage bellowed:

"Are the Omahas wolves that they turn on their friends? Flying Crow died the death of a warrior. You have won a great victory. If there is weakness in the sacred bag look to the Swan who has charge of it, not to the white trappers, who faced death that the Buffalo people might break off the heads of their enemies."

This bold speech impressed the Omahas; but the keeper of the bag had a strong following. Yellow Smoke frowned and said:

"We will move the camp to the Elkhorn. The white men will go with us. After we have set up the sacred tents again we will make medicine to see if the Big Bull spoiled the medicine in the bag."

"It was opened four times, its mouth toward the Dakotas," passionately cried the keeper.

"They say the white hunters once lived with the Dakotas," muttered a warrior.

"Ho, warriors! Ride with the white men in the middle that they may not lose the way," grimly ordered Yellow Smoke. And the victorious, yet downcast, Omahas set out for their camp with the trappers virtually prisoners.

"See what yer clumsy meddlin' got us into," hissed Matt.

"They always blame a misfire o' their medicine on to somethin'," defended Rusty. "Anyway, they won't take up our case till they reach th' Elkhorn, an' we'll shove f'r th' mountings th' first dark night. What'n dernation d'ye s'pose is in that bag, anyway?"

"They'll have yer mangy scalp in it mighty soon."

"Mebbe; but there'll be a big shortage o' Omaha ha'r afore that same happens," was the philosophical rejoinder.

THE SUN was resting on the edge of the prairie when the war-party sighted the camp. Already the lodges were down and fastened in travois-form to horse and dog. As the old men and

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women and children rushed out to meet the warriors the latter discharged guns to signal foes had been killed, while others fired the grass to tell of scalps taken. But before the camp could give way to unrestricted rejoicing Yellow Smoke leaped from his horse and threw himself prostrate, to warn of casualties. The fact a chief did this informed the camp a warrior of great renown had fallen; and the shouts of triumph became lamentations.

"Howl yer heads off," fumed Big Rusty. "'Spect sixty men to lambast two hundred an' no one git hurt? Ain't that th' Injun of it, Matty?"

"It's th'——of it—f'r ye an' me," was the somber reply. "In five minutes every thing on two legs 'round here will have but one thought—Big Bull meddled with th' tribe's medicine an' th' Crow was wiped out. See how close Standing Swan an' his friends stick to us."

"I want him to," rumbled Big Rusty. 'I'll have a look into that bunch o' buckskin afore I die."

As the war-party entered the dismantled camp, scouts came tearing in to announce the defeated Dakotas were making smokes, presumably to call up other bands. This news threw the Omahas into confusion as the Dakota way of hurling six or seven hundred fighting men into battle was well known. Once the Omahas reached the Elkhorn, however, other gens would flock in and offset the big odds. The camp police accordingly redoubled their efforts in straightening out the snarl of horse and dog travois, screaming women and children.

The trappers secured their pack-animals, but wherever they moved through the gathering dusk there followed the keeper of the sacred bag and his chosen assistants, while a line of young bucks, with bows and arrows ready, were always between them and the open prairie. Although seemingly in great disorder the camp proceeded with the work methodically now the worst was known; and as darkness rushed across the plain the last lodge was transformed into a travois and loaded with the old and weak. Then Yellow Smoke marshalled his warriors, threw out scouts toward the north, and directed Matt and Rusty to ride in the middle of the long procession.

Little Matt mouthed oaths under his breath as he realized they were being taken prisoners to the Elkhorn. A deep chuckle from Rusty caused him to turn about in anger and amazement.

"What's chawin' ye?" he snapped. "Don't ye know every step is takin' us that much nearer a funeral in which we'll be th' chief figgers?"

"Keep yer ha'r on, Matty," hoarsely whispered Rusty. "Our pack-animuls will soon act fractious an' I'll have to drop back through th' line afore I can bring 'em to reason. When ye hear me cough like a wounded buf'ler be ready to make a break f'r th' prairie. Keep shovin' an' I'll pick ye up afore mornin'."

"With a bunch o' arrers in my back."

"I don't opine so. I reckon there'll be so much excitement ye'll git clear without bein' missed."

A minute later the two pack-animals began plunging and kicking, and Big Rusty yelled for room and sought to crowd his horse between them. The three horses began milling about viciously and the warriors behind them got out of the way. The darkness added to the panic.

"Now, what's th' crazy ijiot up to?" Little Matt was wondering, when the cough of a wounded buffalo sounded at the end of the line, quickly followed by the terrific, booming bellow of a bull running amuck.

Horses reared and plunged, and madly bolted from the line. Above the clamor sounded the stentorian voice of Rusty, crying:

"Shove, ye runt! Shove!"

Little Matt yanked his horse aside and darted toward the north. He rode for nearly a minute before the noise behind him subsided to be succeeded by a sharp yelp. His flight was discovered, but he did not believe he would be pursued far so long as he rode straight toward the Dakotas.

Toward morning, while ambling leisurely along, he heard Rusty's fog-horn of a voice calling him, and the giant's form topped a sand-hill, looming doubly big in the early mists. Matt galloped to meet him and gave a cheer on beholding their pack-animals. But as he breasted the hill and beheld a third animal, heavily loaded, he exclaimed—

"Where'd ye find that Injun nag?"

"He jest would tag along after me," said Rusty with a broad grin. "Lawdy, but didn't my buf'ler talk skeer 'em!"

Little Matt stared spell-bound at the Indian pony It was loaded with poles and

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skins, and poles were always dragged as a travois. Leaping from his mount he ran to the animal and examined the skins. As he feared, he found a cornstalk painted on one. Investigating further he found other painted cornstalks, three in all, one for each side of the entrance, and one for the back of the tent opposite the entrance, the symbols designating the sacred tent of the Hanga gens. Next he recognized the sacred pole of cottonwood, eight feet in length, with its eighteen-inch piece of ash lashed to the butt.

"Now, ye've killed us!" yelled Matt. "Ye've hooked off with their sacred tent an' pole! Don't ye know th' Omahas claim that pole was cut two hundred years ago, an' that they'll git it back with th' sculps of th' thieves if they never do nothin' else?"

Big Rusty looked a bit sheepish; then showed his teeth in an ugly grimace, and said:

"Th' keeper got in my way when I was lightin' out. He'd tied th' sacred bag to th' pole. I didn't have time to look into it, so I shoved with th' whole outfit. Now, it's here I reckon I'll see jest what's in that bag."

With that he pulled out his knife and ripped loose the skins till he came to the bag. With a slash of his blade he slit it open. Out tumbled some red, blue and yellow feathers and a small bladder of tobacco. There was nothing else.

Rusty stared at the stuff blankly, then exclaimed in huge disgust—

"Wal, I'll be derned!"

THE SKIN covering of the sacred tent was burned, but Rusty would not listen to a similar fate for the sacred pole. Little Matt protested in vain. His companion doggedly insisted:

"Ye said yerself it was cut more'n two hundred years ago. Then there must be big medicine in it. Anyway, it ain't hefty an' I'll tote it."

They arrived at their cache in a hidden valley on the west side of the Medicine Bow range without encountering any obstacles; and Big Rusty warmly declared it was the virtues of the pole that permitted them to avoid the numerous hunting and war-parties of the different tribes. The valley was a tiny one and its mouth was masked by a heavy growth. From it issued a sparkling tributary to the north fork of the Platte. Beyond the Platte rose the Green River range.

Little Matt expanded and waxed mellow now he was back to their hidden home, a stout cabin of logs, with the real work before them. They were snugly situated, with plenty of wood and water and an abundance of game. They could find no signs of any one having visited the valley since their departure the Spring before. They unearthed their store of powder and lead and hung up their dried meat by the fireplace. Then Big Rusty triumphantly erected the sacred pole in the middle of the cabin after cutting a small hole through the roof through which it stuck. To make it useful he drove pegs into it to accommodate their powder-horns and spare traps.

"Reckon we have a heap to thank that pole f'r," he remarked one night as they puffed their pipes before the fire. "Never see it so mild an' soft like at this time o' th' year afore."

Little Matt bridled and snapped:

"Even think that pole makes good weather, eh? Mebbe ye reckon it's snowin' cats 'n' dogs over on th' Green-River Mountings. There ain't no sacred pole over there."

"No good o' knockin' a friendly medicine," rebuked Rusty.

"I don't go f'r to knock no medicine," denied Matt. "I only opine Injun medicine ain't f'r white folks. It may seem all smooth an' friendly, then th' first thing ye know ye wake up bald-headed with th' squaws carryin' yer ha'r on a pole in a sculp dance."

"Ye onery, fault-findin' runt!" exploded Rusty. "Even yer grub can't agree with ye!"

"Mebbe so, but I had a dream last night. That there pole swung out of a sudden an' hit ye a clip over th' head. Dreams must mean somethin', else why should folks have 'em?"

"Why should they have smallpox an' measles?" jeered Rusty, yet experiencing a slight uneasiness. "What ye want to dream that I got th' clip f'r?"

"I jest say this; Injun medicine has to be watched, or it'll play ye tricks. It ain't like a dog what'll make friends with anybody. If that's a medicine pole don't ye 'low it feels mad about th' way ye burned that tent?"

"Dad blame it! Ye was th' one that made me burn it!" accused Rusty. "I was

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f'r fetchin' it along. Mebbe if we made one of 'em sacred bags an' hung it on it—huh?"

"'Twouldn't do no harm; might do a heap o' good," slowly conceded Matt. "But there oughter be a sculp fastened to th' top. Th' Omahas always give their fresh sculps to it. But we ain't got no sculps."

"Not yet," murmured Big Rusty, his eyes gleaming.

Then he slapped his knee and roared:

"We're two dog-gone fools! Remember when Yaller Smoke's hoss run away an' knocked over one o' their sacred tents? Remember how they rubbed th' hoss in wild sage so's he wouldn't git gored by a buf'ler f'r knockin' down th' tent? Ain't we some sim'lar to that hoss? Ain't we been sort o' violent toward that tent an' pole?"

Little Matt removed his pipe and stared admiringly at his friend.

"Derned if ye ain't got somethin' in that big noodle o' yern, Rusty! Only we ain't got no wild sage."

"We'll git some termorrer an' rub ourselves all over in it," declared Rusty. "An' if we have any luck at all we may find a sculp or two down at th' mouth o' th' main valley. How clear that coyote's howl carries." The last as the cry of a coyote sounded out in the main valley.

Little Matt nodded dreamily, suddenly stiffened and held up a hand. The call was repeated and answered from up in the mountains back of the cabin. Matt hung a blanket before the fire and dropped the bar across the door, and whispered:

"Omahas! After their pole!"

WITH THE first gray light of morning the two were in the mountains, scouting for hostile signs. For hours they followed the range north without discovering anything suspicious. Late in the afternoon they beat back on a thousand-foot altitude.

"Reckon it was coyotes all right," decided Rusty as they halted in a clump of fir and stared down the ridge.

"Omaha scouts," tersely replied Matt. "Better leave the pole down in th' main valley. If they find it they'll skin f'r home."

"No, siree!" objected Rusty. "I know that pole's big medicine f'r us. Beaver signs never so good. If they want it they can come an' git it."

"Look!" exclaimed Matt, pointing across the Platte. "They've come f'r it!"

A thin line of smoke was rising beyond the river. Farther away, in the north, rose a similar signal. Both wheeled and anxiously scrutinized the back country. They were hemmed in, for a third shaft of smoke was speaking its message behind them.

"I told ye th' pole would catch us if we didn't watch out," remarked Matt.

"It ain't caught us yet! If it hankers f'r sculps it can have 'em—Omaha ones. Shove f'r th' cabin. They can't dig us out o' there in a year o' Christmases. An' they won't dare to stick 'round long on account o' the Dakotas."

His observations were punctuated by a rifle-shot up the slope. The lead whined over their heads and blazed a patch of white on the damp trunk of a fir. A loud whoop followed the shot and they had a momentary glimpse of an Indian's head raised above a boulder, the vivid red cheeks and short-cropped hair of the Omaha finally establishing the identity of the assailants.

Little Matt watched the boulder while Big Rusty pushed through the firs and studied the slopes below. Near the boulder was a clump of stunted growth, and Matt believed the brave would make for this, and watched the short, open space between it and the rock. Like a brown streak the Omaha scout attempted to cross the opening, but midway sprang high in the air and came down on his face.

"One sculp f'r th' pole," muttered Matt, hastily reloading.

A howl of rage rippled along the heights above, showing the dead scout had not been alone. Answering cries sounded below. By pursuing a course parallel to the base of the ridge the trappers would strike the wall of the hidden valley a short distance back of their cabin. Matt called on Rusty to follow him and worked rapidly toward this objective. When compelled to cross a stretch of bare ledge several bullets spanged at their feet, showing that the force below was keeping abreast of their advance. Big Rusty deliberately halted, fully exposed to those above as well as below, and aimed carefully. His shot scored a death-yell; and he complacently remarked—

"'Nother sculp f'r th' pole."

But now arrows from above began hurtling about them as the upper band of Omahas crept closer. Quitting the ledge the two raced along the crest of the slope, at times hidden from the band below, again

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concealed from the band above them, but seldom removed from the ken of both parties at the same time. Nerved to reckless daring because of the insult to their medicine the Omahas pressed the chase closely, but the trappers soon perceived that the warriors above them formed the greatest source of danger.

These were now descending so impetuously that, regardless of the danger of being cut off by those below, the trappers were forced to make a stand long enough to score three victims. The delay cost them dearly, for as they turned to resume their flight a volley greeted them, and Little Matt shrilly cried:

"They've got in atween us an' th' valley. An' we can't go up, or down."

"Then we'll go through!" bellowed Big Rusty, adding his realistic imitation of a wounded bull. He crashed forward, firing his rifle and pistol and then swinging the rifle as a club, his Berserk rage leveling the bushes and scattering the lurking foe. Little Matt kept at his heels, and through the hole the giant made the two gained the slope leading to the little valley and plunged down-grade.

Under cover of the spruce bordering the little stream they began their race for the cabin, only now it was Rusty who insisted on bringing up the rear. Matt sprinted to the door of the cabin and threw it open and for the first time realized his friend was not at his heels. He turned and beheld him some distance back, staggering along, his eyes bloodshot, his red hair falling across his face. At every step he shook his big head and uttered his rumbling roar of defiance. Matt raced to his side and emptied his rifle and pistols and checked the pursuit long enough to support his friend to the cabin.

"Where ye hurt, partner?" he cried as he made the door fast and hastily reloaded his rifle and a spare one, and his two pistols.

Big Rusty swayed drunkenly, leaning on the barrel of his shattered rifle. His eyes rested on the sacred pole. Steadying himself he swung the rifle barrel with both hands, but slipped and fell before he could deliver the blow.

"Give 'em ——!" he murmured.

Little Matt could not pause to render him assistance. Already the attack was being pressed home. A rifle barrel was thrust through the small opening which served as a window. With his pistol he shot the man behind it and masked the opening with a heavy slab. Fire spurted through several loop-holes. With remarkable rapidity he plugged these with pieces of hewn oak.

"They say Tce-dona-ha (The Buffalo Bull) travels to the Spirit Land!" taunted one of the besiegers.

Big Rusty's ears, dulled with creeping death, caught the scoffing words. Up came his head, and from his red throat pealed a terrific bellow to give the lie. Then he slumped on his face and Little Matt knew he was dead.

It was ominously quiet outside the cabin. Night had come and Matt felt his way through the inky blackness to his friend and took time to sense the full shock of his loss. Crouching by the body he reviewed the years they had been together. It seemed so pitiable that one so big and strong should be snuffed out by a chance shot. He roused himself to drag the body to one side and then seated himself on the keg of powder and dumbly waited. For a long time he sat there, indifferent to his own fate, then was aroused by a soft scraping sound on the log wall.

Some one was mounting to the roof. He found the two rifles and Rusty's and his pistols and despite the Stygian darkness managed to load them. Now he heard others climbing to the roof, which was composed of logs and bullet-proof. Suddenly something moved close to his side and he discharged a pistol, only to discover the braves on the roof had come upon the top of the sacred pole and were drawing it up. He thrust a rifle alongside the pole and fired and was rewarded by a yell and the sound of a heavy body falling to the ground.

Pandemonium now broke out overhead and eager hands began tearing away at the logs. Once they loosened a section they would drop down upon him. His heel hit the powder keg, and with a blow of his axe he smashed in the head and began laying a train to the door.

"It's what ye'd admire f'r me to do, partner," he gulped, producing his flint and steel and crouching by the door.

With a rip and a crash a section of the logs gave way, allowing a panel of twinkling stars to be seen. Little Matt coaxed a train of sparks from the steel and threw open the door to roll out into the night. The mighty whoop of triumph, and the sound of bodies dropping through the roof was abruptly smothered by a deafening explosion.

For nearly a minute there was a deathly

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silence, except for the shower of débris raining down. The darkness settled back, velvet thick, but only for a moment. For to the astonishment of the trapper a strange, soft light began pervading the valley. The surviving Indians were screaming with terror.

The light was not caused by the explosion; it was from above. And as Little Matt twisted his head he was appalled by the glory he beheld. From horizon to horizon, from the zenith to all points of the compass, the heavens dripped golden stars and scintillated with meteors. Dazed by the sublime spectacle Little Matt forgot the Omahas and waited for the world to end.

THE TRAPPER stood erect in the morning sun and rubbed his eyes stupidly. There was the shattered cabin. The Medicine Bow and Green River ranges were unchanged. The Omahas had fled to record in their Winter-Count, "The-Storm-of-Stars-Winter," as did every plains tribe after that eventful November 13, 1833.

Shaking himself into action the trapper examined the ruins of the cabin, muttering:

"That pole was sure big medicine to jar all them stars loose. Oh, Lawd, Rusty, ol' partner, why didn't we git some wild sage an' stop all this!"

Big Rusty's body was covered with logs and his spirit was far afield on new trails and could not answer his friend's lament. Little Matt heaped rocks about and above the timbers, then found a piece of buckskin and a charred stick, and, as a last service of the dead, laboriously printed and posted on a convenient tree:

big rusty wiped out nite of fallin stars by omhas best partnur man evr had died of medlin with injun medcin

CUTTING UP THE RANCH

BY E. A. BRININSTOOL

THEY'RE cuttin' up the old home ranch in little dinky plots,
And every day there is a crowd a-buyin' buildin' lots.
Where once we rounded up the steer and herded calf and cow,
They're layin' concrete walks around and ce-ment curbin's now.

Down by the log corral they've fixed a site for a hotel—
The plans the feller showed to us sure calls for somethin' swell.
Us punchers don't ride any more becuz the range is dead—
They keep us busy pullin' weeds er buildin' fence, instead.

We've traded off our chaps and spurs, and look like silly fools
A-roundin' of the sagebrush up with tenderfoot farm tools.
No more the brandin' fires gleam, nor long-horned cattle bawl,
Becuz where once we rode the range, the trolley cars now crawl.

They've wire-fenced the grassy heights, and some o' them wise ginks
Are layin' sections of it out to use fer golfin' links.
And where the bunch-grass once grew rank, they've grubbed it from the ground,
And city dudes in ice-cream suits now knocks a ball around!

I guess the good old days is gone; the cow game's on the bum;
The hand o' Progress has stepped in and got us goin' some.
In every draw and coulee now, they've spread big signs that say:

THIS LOT FOR SALE. TEN DOLLARS DOWN. THE BALANCE EASY PAY.

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The LITTLE TRAPPER of NOBODY'S COUNTRY

by HAPSBURG LIEBE

Author of "Blood of the Allisons," "With Pistol and Second Reader," etc.

HE WAS eleven years old, and very mannish in his ways, and he was the only child and chief support of widowed Esther McDaniel, who had married solely because she had no close relatives to keep her. For a long, long time this little trapper had been trying to catch one big black mink in particular—he knew it was a mink, though he had seen it only during the dusk of evenings. It had been running toward the creek each time he had caught a glimpse of it. Had it been merely a half-wild housecat, it would have gone the way of least resistance.

His name was Thomas. Not Tom, but Thomas. His father's name had been Tom. And now, very early in the frosty morning of a bright day in November, the barefooted and freckled Thomas McDaniel lay peering through a fringe of mountain laurel that grew along the brink of Coonhead Bluff, peering toward a steel trap on the bank of the sparkling stream below. He had caught the coveted mink at last, by both forefeet, and his young heart sang with delight.

Because some unknown thief had been robbing his traps for two weeks, he had not gone down to it; he was lying there in wait, trying to catch the thief as well as the mink. The sleek black animal sat looking at him stolidly with its frightened, beady eyes.

Suddenly he heard the sounds of heavy and booted feet moving down the nearer creek bank, toward his trap. He slipped forward the barrel of the repeater that had been his father's and watched breathlessly. Not that he would shoot any person for stealing his property, for his mother's code and his forbade him to kill unless it were to save a better life. But the trap-thief had no means of knowing that he wouldn't.

The thief came around a boulder, and Thomas saw to his intense dismay that it was the iron-gray giant, "Old Bad" Whitson. Old Bad Whitson, who returned to Nobody's Country now and then because it was home to him, and because he hoped some day to come upon and wipe out the last man of the name Faidley that he hated. Old Bad Whitson, who had killed the father of Thomas McDaniel before Thomas was born, and who was now robbing the traps of dead Tom McDaniel's little son without the faintest scruple. His friend, "Pap" Longley, sold the hides for him.

The boy did not fire upon this man for whose body, alive or dead, the governors of two States were offering standing rewards, because he had been taught differently—and because Whitson deserved no such clean death as death by a bullet. Thomas McDaniel meant to see that Whitson was hanged higher than Haman; it was the greatest aim of his life. To the mountaineer there is always a little wild glory in dying with one's boots on, you know; but there is nothing but the vilest of disgrace in passing at the end of the hangman's rope.

Whitson bent over the squirming mink. The little trapper's teeth set tightly. The Winchester clicked as the trigger-dog caught the hammer. Whitson heard it and straightened quickly, raised his big hands and looked toward the clifftop. He saw both the brown eye of the boy and the black eye of the rifle, and he wasn't much afraid.

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"All right?" he drawled queerly.

"Don't ye tech my mink, Old Bad," said Thomas, quietly but very angrily. "And I shore don't want to ketch ye a takin' stuff out o' my traps no more, neither. I could kill ye easy, ef I wanted to, Old Bad. S'posen ye jest walk off now; humph?"

He had the drop, but he wasn't fool enough to believe that he could keep it. Whitson was more than clever in the use of the revolver he wore on his hip, and he was not of the kind that hesitates to shoot a boy. It was the wiser course the lad pursued.

The outlaw laughed whimsically.

"All right."

He gave his beard a tug, turned and walked away. Thomas hardly moved until he had been gone for half an hour; then Thomas made his way down the rugged face of the cliff, killed the mink with a blow from the butt of his rifle, took the slender body out of the steel jaws, and hastened joyously toward home and his pretty, half-buxom mother.

LAUREL FORK is a stream that splits itself and joins again around a dozen square miles of rugged Southern highland. Since this big creek was looked upon as a part of the Tennessee-North Carolina State line, no sheriff assumed responsibility for the behavior of those who lived in the "island;" so it became a sort of no man's land which the hillfolk called "Nobody's Country." In here Old Bad Whitson, some fifteen years before, had organized a band of cutthroats.

The Whitsons had quickly become unbearable. Then a family of stalwart men named Faidley had taken it upon themselves to break up the Whitsons, and they had done it in no time. Save for their leader, every member of the outlaw faction died in his boots, and Old Bad had to flee. But after two years he returned, half-mad, and sniped off every man Faidley but one.

When Abel Faidley was eighteen, his mother took him to Kentucky to save him. He went against his will, and he stayed against his will; he did it because he idolized his mother, who had lost so much. She was a lowland woman, with an innate love of peace. It was hard for Abel. He left a sweetheart, and he regretted to go because he was a Faidley and therefore disliked to run even from Old Bad Whitson.

Abel did not leave Kentucky's mountains until after his mother's death, more than twelve years later. Then he went back to the homeland, the land that had always beckoned. Besides, he wished to see Esther, the sweetheart of his boyhood, whom he had never forgotten—she was married, but he could at least look at her. Abel himself had not married.

THE LITTLE trapper approached the cabin softly. He wished to effect a surprise with his catch. Esther McDaniel was in the best room, and her son tiptoed into it without the slightest telltale creak from the worn floor. She sat with her back to him, and he saw that she held in her two hands a faded and old-fashioned photograph that he had once before found her looking at. It was the likeness of a young man who was not his father—he had often seen his father's picture.

"Est'er?" he said; it is not uncommon to hear a boy of the hills calling his father or mother by his or her first name, and it doesn't sound as outlandish as you'd think. In fact there is a droll sweetness to it.

"Est'er?"

Esther saw that she was fairly caught. She rose hastily, somehow guiltily, confronted him and went a trifle pale. Thomas McDaniel had entered upon the outskirts of a holy of holies that reached back into her early youth, back even to her childhood.

"Why, ef ye hain't got the big mink, sonny boy!" she exclaimed, trying hard to smile, holding the photograph behind her. "We'll soon be able to buy ye a new suit o' clo'es, sonny boy."

But with her son the prize catch was now a thing of minor importance. He dropped it to the floor, and stepped toward her.

"Whose pitchur is that, Est'er? Are ye a thinkin' o' marryin' ag'in, Est'er?" he wanted to know.

The other time, he had held his curiosity in check; now he couldn't.

His mother sat down. He knelt beside her knee and took up the hand that wasn't holding the downward-turned photograph.

"Est'er," he half-whispered, "you know I love ye, mother, honey sweetness. Ef ye want to marry ag'in, it's not me that'll kick. Tell me, Est'er, honey. I got a right to know, ain't I? I'm yore little man o' the house, now ain't I?"

She put an arm around his shoulders and drew him to her.

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"Yes," she said, "I've decided to marry. Marry to git a man to fight the battle for you and me, acause it's been too hard on you, sonny boy. I want a man who'll take us to the lowland, whar you can go to school and l'arn how to read. I cain't marry the man I'd rather have, but I reckon I can find somebody or another. The man I'd ruther have——"

She broke off and turned the photograph over in her lap. Then she went on:

"He went to Kaintucky when he was eighteen. I was eighteen, too. Now we're both thirty."

Slowly she held the picture out for him to see, and he lost no time in looking. The face was of the dreamer type, rather than of a fighting type; Abel Faidley had taken his features altogether after those of his gentle lowland mother.

"I'd be shore to like that feller," declared Thomas. "He's a plumb good feller, Est'er, I'd bet my left hind laig."

"Yes," murmured Esther McDaniel, her brown eyes filled with a sadness. "Yes, he was a good young man. The Faidleys was allus clean. I believe I'd git that mink's hide on a board, Thomas."

The lad rose and turned toward the doorway that led into the room that served as both kitchen and dining-room, and he found himself facing—Old Bad Whitson!

"What d'ye want?" demanded Esther McDaniel.

"Somethin' to eat," Whitson growled. And that patriarch of hill outlaws continued sharply: "More'n that, I want it quick, Missus McDaniel."

The mother of Thomas went very white.

"Yo're big enough to take 'most anything we got, I reckon, and lowdown enough," she said to him bitingly; "but as for me a givin' ye anything, I hain't never a goin' to do it. It was you killed my man, Old Bad."

"And for the doin' of it," snapped young Thomas McDaniel, "you'll hang higher than Haman. I'll be a man some day, Old Bad, and I'll see 'at you do!"

Whitson sneered. Instead of making a reply, however, he suddenly turned and slipped out of the cabin by the rear doorway, and went skulking rapidly across the vegetable plot and toward the thick woods.

"They do say he can see out o' the back o' his head," muttered Thomas, "and he shorely seed somebody somewhar then."

The little trapper hastened to the front doorway and stood there looking toward the green wall of laurel that rose a few rods beyond the split-paling gate. His keen eyes, the eyes of the woodsman born, soon detected a slight movement in the undergrowth. It must be, he thought, some bold officer on the trail of Old Bad.

And that wasn't far from what Whitson himself thought. He feared being surrounded while in the cabin.

Thomas watched the laurels for half an hour. At the end of that time he saw a tall and a straight, youngish man walk out of the scrub and approach the cabin, and soon he had recognized quite readily the original of the photograph his mother had shown him shortly before.

"Hi," greeted Thomas, smiling.

"Fine mornin'," smiled Abel Faidley, halting at the steps.

Then he saw Esther McDaniel, and he entered the cabin and went toward her with his head bared and his hand outstretched; and pretty, half-buxom Esther put her hand into his and blushed like a girl. She led him into the best room and sat him down before either of them found a word to say.

"Was that Bad Whitson I seed a leavin' here, Est'er?" he finally inquired.

"Yes," she told him. "And you're shore in danger o' yore life as long as you're here, Abel," she went on. "Acause Old Bad, he hain't a livin' for nothin' else but to kill you, the last man Faidley, Abel. It was him 'at got my man, pore Tom; and I—I feel like I—I'd hate for him to git you too."

"I'd done heerd he'd swore to git me," frowned the sweetheart of her youth. "Well, Est'er, I've run from Bad Whitson all I'm ever a-goin' to run from him. I'm a goin' down to Johnsville in the lowland, and have myself made a depity United States marshal, so's I can kill Bad by law. I don't want to kill no man, y'onderstand; but this here Tennessee State is my own home State, bless 'er, and I've jest got to live here ef I live at all! And so it looks like either me or Bad's got to die."

After having gone to the windows and looked out carefully, Faidley went on:

"I heerd ye was married when mother and me had been in Kaintucky a year. But I didn't know about ye a bein' widdered ontel this mornin', when I happened in. Ef I can git Bad Whitson out o' the way, Est'er,

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honey, I—I want ye to le' me marry ye and take keer o' ye; will ye, Est'er?"

Thomas heard it all. He stood in the doorway, watching. He saw his mother go closer to the tall stranger, who rose and kissed her on the cheek with a high reverence. Then he heard his mother utter a low sob, and his eyes began to sting.

"I better go to Johnsville right off," said Faidley. "Whitson might come back here to see whether it was me or not, and I shore want to be depitized afore we meet. Est'er, ye needn't to be bothered about my shootin', acause I was called the best shot in the Kaintucky mountains. I can put might' nigh it six bullets through the same hole at thirty yards, which is shore some fancy shootin'. So long to ye, Est'er!"

He pressed her hand tenderly, this stalwart and determined son of the mountains who was ready to fight the death-fight for the happiness he deserved, and turned toward the doorway. Thomas McDaniel blocked the passage, and he was so pale that his freckles stood out as plainly as specks of brown paint.

"I reckon this here hain't yore boy, Est'er?"

"All I've got," she answered; and she added proudly, "but he's one daisy boy, Abel, and I love him to death!"

"Land alive!" Faidley laughed. "Why, he's blamed nigh it as big as me! Son, ye're shore a fine little feller; and ef it was you 'at ketched all o' them hides 'at's boarded up onder the eaves, ye're shore some trapper. I wonder now, I—I wonder how ye'd like to have me for a dad, son? I'd treat ye right. How about it?"

"You hain't a goin' to shoot Old Bad!" blurted Thomas McDaniel.

Faidley jumped.

"I onderstood he killed ye daddy; didn't he?"

"That's jest it," clipped Thomas. "Old Bad did kill my daddy, and so he has got to hang!"

"Land, boy," replied Faidley, "I'd ruther see him hang, jest the same as you would. But, unforchunately, the' must allus be a ketchin' afore a hangin'; don't ye see? Son, I stayed away from my home State for twelve years on Whitson's account, and I hain't a goin' to stay away no longer. The only way out for me is to shoot Whitson, and I shore will ef I live long enough."

He seized the lad's hand and shook it.

"So long to ye, and good luck!" he said and was gone.

Thomas watched him go with angry eyes. Whitson should not have the same last wild glory that had come in the passing to the members of his band; Whitson had to hang, and that was all there was to it! It was hardly a matter of cheap red vengeance with the boy. Rather, it was the payment of a debt; the keeping of an inviolable code; a matter of strictest, unswerving justice.

When Thomas had finished caring for the big mink's hide, he went to visit his other traps, and found in them only a poor muskrat and the neatly gnawed-off leg of a raccoon. But his mind wasn't on furs now. It was full of Old Bad and hangman's rope.

His brain was a remarkably resourceful brain, it was wonderfully keen. Before noontime had come, he had built up a certain rather daring and desperate scheme of his own. There was at least one chance in two that it would succeed, he believed.

So that afternoon Thomas McDaniel hied himself away to the thickest cove in Nobody's Country, where he made certain preparations, which required all his time until nightfall. He returned to his home cabin to find his mother anxious.

"Est'er," he began, dropping wearily to the doorstep, "when'll Abel be back?"

"Sometime atter dark to-morrow night, sonny boy," answered she. "Why?"

"That's purty good, I reckon," said Thomas. "I'll go in to supper now, Est'er, ef ye don't mind. This here night air is chilly on my bare feet, Est'er, honey sweetness, and I am a leetle bit hongry."

She wanted to know where he had been, and what he had been doing. He joked her questions away because he knew she would be uneasy if she learned the truth. She took him in to supper, which had waited for so long that it was almost cold.

Until midnight tired little Thomas McDaniel lay awake in his bed in the cabin's loft, stared at the drifting stars through a knot-hole in the roof, and thought his plan over and over. When he dropped to sleep at last, he had perfected every detail.

IT WAS generally known that Old Bad Whitson trusted implicitly but one person in Nobody's Country now; and it was generally believed that the outlaw made the cabin of this solitary man his headquarters while on his vists to

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his home mountains. This friend of Whitson's had lost two sons to the Faidley rifles, therefore Whitson felt fairly safe when with him. Pap Longley was ninety years old, and always he had somehow reminded Thomas McDaniel of a gray fox.

The boy knew that he could hoodwink his arch-enemy far more easily through Pap Longley, if he could hoodwink him at all. So, late in the afternoon, Thomas took up his rifle, went to the woods, and made it convenient to pass the dilapidated cabin of Whitson's friend.

Now it chanced that Longley rather liked the little trapper. Many times they had met in the woodland, and they knew each other almost intimately. The lad found a welcome ready for him the moment he stepped into Longley's yard. The parchment-faced old man was standing guard while Whitson dozed in the cabin loft.

"I betche I know somepin' what you don't know!" Thomas began jubilantly. "Abel Faidley, he came back yeste'day. Yeah!"

Immediately Pap Longley's eyes sparkled with hate. Then he remembered, and he assumed a ludicrously fawning manner that would hardly have deceived an infant.

"Come now," he grinned, showing a toothless mouth, "ye don't say! Whar is he at, Thomas?"

"Afeard ye'd tell, Pap Longley."

"Hope to die ef I do," quickly. "Looky here. Cross my heart, Thomas, I won't never tell nobody. Whar is he at?"

"He went back to Johnsville to git hisself depitized as a' officer, so's he could kill Old Bad Whitson by law. But ye shore better not tell 'at it was me told ye, Pap. Est'er might flute my hair, ef she knowed."

The old hill man was wary. He frowned and considered, and then considered yet again. What motive could the boy have in telling that? None whatever, that he could see, save for the desire to share his secret; and that was very boylike.

"Now tomorrow," the lad went on, "it's either his life or Old Bad's. And it might be Old Bad's, acause I shore heard him say 'at he was called the keenest shot in the Kaintucky mountains. Say, Pap, looky here—you hain't no friend o' Whitson's, are ye?"

"Hope to die ef I am," lied Pap Longley. " 'Twixt me and you, I hate Old Bad, son. Oh, no, I wouldn't never tell Old Bad nothin'. Ef I was to tell him, he'd git Faidley tonight. He's turrible."

There was the very lead the boy was playing for.

"He couldn't do it, maybe," and Thomas shook his head, "acause Abel he'll be in a pow'ful good hidin'-place tonight—when he comes back. That 'minds me, Pap; I got to go home and take some grub out and put it whar he will be shore to find it when he comes. Well, so long to ye, Pap Longley, and don't ye tell Old Bad nothin'."

It may be here recorded that each, so to speak, slyly winked to himself as they parted. The moment the boy had disappeared among the laurels, the old man went into the cabin, climbed the ladder that led to the loft, and told Whitson everything. Whitson was suspicious, but always he would take a chance; to him chances made the salt of life. He believed he could outwit twenty United States marshals in the darkness, if it were a trick.

NIGHT'S long black shadows fell. Thomas McDaniel left his mother's cabin carrying a basket covered with snowy white cloths, and Old Bad Whitson followed him without making a noise. At no time was the boy more than two rods ahead of the outlaw; Old Bad trailed him through the night by the white cloths that covered the basket.

When they had gone almost to the upper end of Boomer Cove, where the tree branches shut out even the pale light of the stars, the little trapper of Nobody's Country crept into a laurel copse, put his burden carefully down, and stole back. Whitson sank into the leaves, and allowed him to pass; then Whitson crawled silently to what he believed was food.

There came a sudden dull crash from all sides of him. He shot upward, and his great, iron-gray head struck the top of a heavy log-pen bear trap, from which there was no escape save through an outside agency! In one second he realized all there was to realize. He saw the gallows surely looming for him. His right hand drew a revolver from its holster, lifted it, put its muzzle against his temple. Then he dropped it. Old Bad Whitson had been broken, broken by a boy.

From somewhere among the balsams came a youthful cry of victory—

"Higher than Haman!"

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BLOOD MONEY

BY

WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY

Author of "The Saddle," "Taylor's Finger," etc.

A YOUNG man stood before the bar of a Missouri saloon. He was tall as a Norway pine, fair as a Viking, deadly capable as a machine gun. He was clothed in the arena regalia of the Wild-West outfit whose billowing canvas and listless pennants glistened in the dying sunlight of an August afternoon, over the way.

As he stood listening to the silly and somewhat inebriated complaints of a fellow rider, a stranger entered. The stranger was unknown to the score of punchers and cowgirls making the place their headquarters in the hour between the afternoon performance and the evening meal. His dress showed also that he was not a resident of the town in which the show was exhibiting. There was a battered sombrero on his head and a long bulky overcoat fell to his knees despite the heat of the season.

This man came into the bar warily. Pausing a few feet from the swinging doors he scrutinized each face. When he moved forward into the room he glanced involuntarily over one shoulder. His features were harsh and cruel. His eyes were dull gray and carried a perpetually blank expression. He kept his right hand in his overcoat pocket.

Satisfied with the identity of each person in the room, he moved forward to the bar. One or two of the punchers cast curious glances at him. A knot of the girls made way for him. They left a space at the bar beside the tall and fair young man of machine-gun grimness.

The young Viking turned and looked at the stranger. For a full quarter-minute he gazed levelly into the expressionless eyes of the other. The tall young man blinked once or twice in that encounter. There was no other recognition.

"Have a drink?" invited the stranger.

"Much obliged," answered the young Viking in a quiet modulated voice. His enunciation and manner appeared at variance with his calling and indicated better education and breeding than the ordinary show-rider possesses.

The tall young man indicated his choice. The stranger did likewise. They drank in silence.

When they had finished, the young man did not offer to return the treat. The stranger pulled the foam from a pair of Simon Legree mustaches. He looked around the room to note if any one was watching him too closely. Satisfied that they were not—for many and varied are the characters which follow the wake of an open-air amusement enterprise—he walked back to the swinging doors, pushed through them and disappeared.

When he had gone, the young man stood rigid, staring blankly at the frosted mirror behind the bar. After a moment he came from his trance with a jolt. He glanced

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searchingly about the room. His clean-shaven lips closed tightly. Finally his searching glance found me at a table in the far corner. He made his way through the crowd and yanked his thumb in the direction of the door. Recognizing the gesture, I arose and followed.

Outside on the walk the young man looked up and down the street. But the stranger in the sombrero and overcoat had disappeared.

"What time is it, Billie?" demanded my friend.

I investigated and replied that it was quarter after five.

"Three-quarters of an hour to supper," he declared. "Let's get out of here. Let's walk."

The Carstock show was pitched on the edge of town. Five minutes of walking took us past the last house with the open country before us.

"Did you see him?" were Jim's first words.

"Who?"

"The chap that just asked me to drink in the booze parlor?"

"Yes! Who was he?"

"You didn't recognize him?"

"No!"

"I hope I was the only one that did."

"Why?"

"That man was 'Bad' Egan."

"What's that you say?"

"That man was Bad Egan."

We walked for another three minutes giving Jim's statement a chance to percolate through my credulity. I knew Jimmy Knott too well to doubt his word or have any misgivings about his recognition of the stranger.

"There's fifty thousand dollars on his head!" I gasped.

"There is," Jim agreed.

"Why is he exposing himself by mingling that way among the boys who might recognize him?"

"Because," Jim replied, "that poor chap can't keep away from the boys in chaparejos any more than an old sailor can keep away from the sea. That's the third time I've seen him in the last two months. He always does just what he did to-day. He ranges alongside me and asks me to have a drink. It's always just one drink. Then he goes his way. He's the most pathetic person I know. I am beginning to believe that following me in this way is some kind of sign. But I can't dope out just yet what he wants."

"Then you know him?"

"Certainly, I know him."

"Then why don't you have a talk with him?"

"It might cost me my life."

"What?"

"Certainly. If I as much as recognize him by the slightest nod he might put a lead pill through me. Do you know why he kept his right hand in his overcoat pocket? Because his steel fingers were wrapped around the butt of a six-gun. Do you know why that outside overcoat made him look so bulky? Because he had six coats on underneath it. If any old-timer should recognize him, he would shoot and make his getaway.

"At the first corner he would shed one of the coats. At the second corner he would shed another. No one could follow him after such changes of apparel. It's an old ruse. What's more the pockets of all those coats give him the chance to carry guns. I'll bet there were a dozen on him. A man with fifty thousand dollars on his head takes no chances."

"But it was over twenty-two years ago that Bad Egan's last alleged crime was committed. I thought that in twenty years his crimes became outlawed."

"Crimes like Bad Egan is charged with committing are never outlawed."

"Do you believe Egan is guilty of the crimes charged up to him?"

"I should say not. I don't believe Egan is guilty of a single one."

"What?"

"Not a one!"

"Then why doesn't he stop this Wandering-Jew existence, give himself up, face the music and have the misunderstanding over with?"

"There's no chance, and Egan knows it. Most of the men who might vindicate him are dead. He's been three times convicted by overwhelming circumstantial evidence. But circumstantial evidence is circumstantial evidence."

"His actions seem to speak for themselves."

"Oh, I don't doubt but Egan's mighty bitter toward society. That's what makes him act that way. Of course, there's the crimes of breaking jail. Whether or not it's a crime for an innocent man to break

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jail depends on how you look at it. But aside from them, I think that Egan's actions are due more to the fact that unreasonable judges have made him a goat, punishing him more as an example to others than because he merits the punishment because of the evidence."

"I've never blabbed anything yet that you have told me in confidence. What was the cause of Egan's fall from grace, anyhow?"

"IT STARTED over a girl, Billie. She come from the North, down to Lone Star, the Texas town where Egan used to ride in from the ranch on Saturday afternoon for a little progressive hell. I was a fair-sized kid in the town at the time. I knew Egan fairly well because he had saved my life once when I had lost my way in the prickly pear.

"Egan fell in love with the girl. Just about the time he was making good progress toward matrimony, a chap named Chase showed up from the North. He declared the girl had promised to marry him and she owned up it was so.

"Finally they agreed to leave it to a game of cards, these two. The loser was to get out of town, never return, and leave the girl to the other.

"Chase cheated in that card game. Egan pumped him full of lead. He got one shot in particular at him sideways. It ripped open Chase's chest as though he'd been slashed with a hog knife.

"He was about to exterminate the cuss—with the town's permission—when the girl rushed in, regular Pocahontas fashion, and did amateur theatricals all over the place. She ended up by declaring for the skunk, calling Egan a murderer and making out such a case against him that Egan's friends rushed him out of the corporate limits of the place.

"History says Egan went to the bad. My home town says it was a broken heart. He was only a boy, inside, anyhow. He came back a few nights later and shot up the place. Shooting up a city wasn't such an awful crime in those days. The trouble was that in the fracas he accidentally killed the girl he had loved.

"I've always thought that sort of unbalanced Egan. He rode off by himself into the brush. For seven years he was never seen again by any who knew him.

"Well, those were the days of wild and woolly train robberies down in our section of the country. Innocent folks were shot in those robberies and lots of money taken, all charged up to Egan. And the reason why they were charged up to Egan was because after they were pulled off, apparently the wild and heartbroken Egan left a note in bravado where the authorities always found it, declaring who was responsible for it and taunting them to take him alive.

"Well, at the end of seven years Egan was captured. He protested he was innocent, that he had been down in Mexico all the time. But he couldn't prove it. He was sentenced to swing.

"He broke away before the sentence was executed. They hunted him for three years more. During that time still more robberies were committed. His depredations were more lawless and reckless. Always the note of confession was there, signed with his name.

"For the last twenty years Egan's been pretty quiet. But the fifty thousand reward still holds good and Egan knows it."

"That's a whale of a lot of money, Jim," said I.

"It is," he agreed.

"And you could make it by simply giving him away to the authorities?"

I was sorry that I made the last statement. Jim turned on me with a look in his eye that I had never seen there before.

"I never sell out my friends for blood-money," he remarked coldly. "Besides, Egan saved my life once. We don't forget such things—down in our country."

I marvelled at the character of the man who placed honor and friendship above the sum of fifty thousand dollars.

"What's the outcome of this, Jim?" I demanded. "If Egan keeps following us as you say he has for the last two months, he's going to run a tremendous risk. Doesn't he know we're headed for the Texas country, right now? If he keeps on he's liable to encounter some one who recognizes him."

"I should hate to see Egan taken," Jim said. "The poor cuss already must have suffered a lot in the last twenty years. Think of never being able to go to sleep for a solid night's rest without the worry of capture before morning. Think of never being able to communicate with your friends nor mingle freely with your fellow men without the constant fear of a hand ever ready to

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fall on your shoulder, and some one ready to turn you over for the cash which you will bring."

"Well," said I, "why become worked up over it? What can you do about it?"

"I don't know," confessed Jim. "Somehow the whole thing is a mess. I believe Egan innocent and yet his actions disprove it. Egan follows me about and drinks with me. Sometimes I think it's a sign he wants my help. But I hardly dare suggest it. The long years of wandering about without a friend, with every man's hand against him, have made Egan a sort of monomaniac. He might resent it; he might welcome it. I hardly know whether to risk the chance."

"Maybe," said I, "if you don't do anything, the situation will work itself out. It seems to me that if Egan wanted your help, he could contrive some way to write to you without endangering himself."

"Well," said Jim, "I stand ready to help him the moment he wants it. Probably Egan isn't sure of this and so we're deadlocked."

"Well," said I, "if you've walked me out here to get my advice, I say don't do anything. Let Egan take the initiative himself. Time will tell. We're headed now for Texas. If I'm not mistaken, Lone Star's on our route card during the first half of September. Let's see if Egan shows himself again in the forbidden country."

II

THREE weeks later we were playing in Texas. It was difficult to recognize in the modern business blocks, the miles of paved streets, the brownstone municipal buildings, the little cowtown of Jim's narrative. But thirty years have wrought many changes in the Southwest. Down by the depot were rows of crazy little structures which had once housed the chief commercial interests. In them many an indiscreet puncher had passed away with his pedal accouterments unremoved from their proper postion on his anatomy.

It was now a hustling little city of about thirty thousand people. The first day we did a record business at both performances. We got through the second afternoon show, also, without fatalities in performers, spectators or box-office. Up to Tuesday noon Bad Egan did not put in his appearance. I began to wonder if Jim had been alarmed unduly.

Yet I couldn't forget those peculiar eyes of the hunted man nor the sight of some mighty scrawny and picturesque old-timers that were always hanging around and didn't need any placard hung on their chests to vouch for their experiences when the town was an unprincipled infant in asbestos diapers.

The climax of the suspense came at five-thirty of Tuesday afternoon. Jim and I were headed toward the chuck tent booth for the evening meal. Tony Milo's dago band stopped out front because the crowd was dead. When the resultant hush fell on the lot, sharp and clear came the sudden staccato of gunshots.

We listened. It was off to the southeast.

"It's a gun-fight, Billie."

"Could some of our boys have gotten in trouble?"

"Must be," he replied. "Only I don't need any frontier encyclopedia to tell me that there's more'n two guns in that mix-up!"

As we crossed the arena we heard a rush and pummel of hoofs that did not belong to our horses. A squad of horsemen charged the place. They pulled up in front of the office tent, the sheriff in the lead. We knew him from his silver star.

"I want men!" he cried. "I want men who know how to shoot! We've got a killer ringed, out on the Harristown road. There's fifty thousand on his head and we all can use the money. I'll divvy well for men."

At this Jim sprang forward with a curse of hate. I restrained him.

"How came it he was surrounded so quickly?" I demanded of Carstock when our boss came back from his parley and the horsemen had pounded away.

"I understand," the big boss replied, "that he was recognized by the local sheriff. But the sheriff lacked the stomach to tackle him alone. He got a posse. Egan shot his way to freedom and would have kept it if he could have found a horse or a freight. But he took the Harristown pike alone and afoot; and some of the sheriff's crowd on broncos headed him off. It looks like a nasty mess, boys. Two people have been hurt already."

"If it's all the same to you, Billie, I'd just as soon not go," Jim replied to my questioning look. "He was my friend, Billie. He

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saved my life once. And I was raised from stock that are with their friends to the end."

I don't know what I said. I was too excited to remember. The increasing tattoo of distant shots meant a sheriff's posse closing in about a genuine desperado—the last of the bad men of the old West—with the lone chap making a last stand for his life, death and destruction in every puff of smoke that came from either side.

I got out my horse, made a quick saddle and galloped across the town. Most of the boys were already in transit.

I left Jim seated silently and tragically on the first row of empty green seats beside the arena. I remember that with studious face he had started to make a cigaret.

The battle-ground presented a livid scene. The city proper was nearly deserted. All the population seemed surging out there to the southeast. The roads were filled with teams, horses, automobiles and white-faced, excited pedestrians. The boys and men were hatless and coatless. There were women holding on to unruly children, aprons still tied in place. It was a stampede—with the line of demarcation sharply defined immediately that the crowd reached the bullet area.

Being on a horse I got through easier. I circled around and came through to the front.

The house where Egan was making his last stand was an old landmark. It was made of mortar and that peculiar red stone in which the country abounded. Most of the doors and windows had been knocked out. Half the roof had fallen in. Up in the dilapidated gable Bad Egan had hidden himself—where he could get a range on all sides of the yard at once.

Behind every tree, rubbish pile, any old thing that gave shelter, was a man with either a six-gun or a carbine. The old house was encircled by them. A ring of steel had surely been thrown around Egan. There was no doubt about it—he was cornered at last; his end was only a matter of ammunition.

I heard a shout above the periodical target-practise at the roof, and its defiance. Off to my right behind a tree a man was trying to get my attention. I rode over. From his badge I knew he was the sheriff.

"You Wild-West feller!" he roared. "Get out your gun and kick in! We want more men here who know how to shoot."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd as lief not," said I.

I backed my bronco out of danger and sat thinking it over. Although I realized my fault, on the other hand I'd been with the boys of the outfit too long not to respect that code which decrees that when you accept a man's friendship, you accept unquestioningly his friends. And Egan, for all his faults, was a friend of Jim's. The sheriff couldn't understand. Any Easterner couldn't understand. But Jim would understand; so would Charley Carstock, our employer, if my decision brought me trouble.

Meantime the battle went on—on and on into the sunset. Occasionally a rotten shingle was torn from the roof by a .30 special soft-nose. It slid down the pitch and fell to the ground.

Even as I watched, one of the posse was wounded, proving the uncanny vigilance Egan was keeping. The fated chap had turned an old wheel-barrow on its side and used it for protection. In working the ejector he shoved the barricade over. Only for a fraction of a minute was he exposed. In that fraction Egan got him.

"They could get some portable barricade and creep up on the house," I remarked to a nearby spectator.

"That wouldn't do them any good," he replied. "The moment any one enters the room below—under the place where Egan's hid in the roof—it means good night. They can't fire the house; it's made of stone. The only way the sheriff can get the outlaw without wasting the lives of his men is to keep potting away, hoping Egan will run out of ammunition. He can't make out why he hasn't done so long before this."

I thought of the many coats with the concealed weapons.

THE sunset gradually deepened into twilight. The twilight turned into night. There was sudden activity behind the danger zone.

"The sheriff's afraid Egan will make his getaway in the dark," I was told. "He's given orders to light big bonfires all about the house. The yard must be kept as light as day."

Working under cover of such portable defenses as they could command, stacks of inflammable material were brought for fires. When it grew so dusky that the men with

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the firearms could no longer discern moving objects, these were lighted.

I have never witnessed a sight more wild and barbarous than those seven great bonfires about that house lighting the landscape with their weird light. At intervals between them there were the crouching men, the glint of the flames playing on the burnished barrels of their ever-ready weapons. Behind was the surging silent crowd; in front the occasional puffs of white smoke from the roof.

I felt a pang of sympathy for the man high up in the gable. I've heard old-time Westerners tell about the Wagon-Box Fight, when thirty-two men on Piney River kept off three thousand savages until help arrived. I know about the Beecher's Island battle when Forsythe and his men on a little spot in the Arichkee fought off Old Roman Nose and his braves until succor came from a distant post.

Those men had hope—reinforcements might arrive in time or that their red enemies might give up the attack and withdraw. But Egan had no such hope. No reinforcements could arrive; the posse had the whole State to draw upon for both ammunition and men. Egan had only the contents of his various guns and cartridge-belts. It was one man against the whole world; against all society; and the battle could have but one inevitable outcome.

I began considering the man hiding up in the roof, as a psychological study. I wondered at the strange strength which sustained him to prolong the battle—both this battle of bullets and the battle of continued existence with every man's hand against him. I felt sorry for him, regardless of all his alleged crimes. Knowing the simple, pathetic story of the thing which had made him an enemy of society, I had a hankering little hope that the impossible might happen—that he might find a way of escape.

Perhaps that same forlorn hope sustained Egan and kept him battling on. Perhaps after all it was just that admirable quality in most men—of sheer gameness not to give up until the last shot is fired and life is ended. Whatever it was, a red-blooded chap couldn't help but admire him for his refusal to say die.

The hours fled. Time passed unheeded in the excitement of that siege. The stars came out. The smoke from the great fires drifted away in savage splendor over the scene lighting the clear night heavens with millions of bogus stars. And continually came the explosion of the carbines, the hoarse commands, the noises of the tense crowd and always Egan's answering defiance from the roof. It still meant death for the man who attempted to carry the structure by assault.

I looked at my watch and gave a guilty start. The performance had opened and closed hours ago. But Carstock would understand.

Finally the crowd thinned out. Women were few. The men behind the carbines gave place to fresh besiegers. Food was brought up. On through the silent night the siege continued. After a time the moon came up. And the old moon never looked down on a scene more weird.

The food and liquid refreshment awakened more bitterness within me. It was another instance of gross unfairness. The men that composed the ring of steel were well-cared for, well-fed, well-supplied with ammunition. For the solitary chap in the gable there was no friend to stand by him in his exhilaration when he scored, no one to share the grim fate that stared at him out of that unreal night-light and smiled in mockery at his dwindling ammunition; no one to bring him food and make the struggle fair. It had stopped being a battle. It was extermination.

I dreaded the coming of the morning. I knew that in the light of another day a way would be found to dislodge him. Yet I stayed and watched—because the savage drama held the same fascination that prompted our ancestors to gaze into the bloody arena and cheer when a conqueror finally lifted a gory sword.

The morning came. A strange unreal gray began to silhouette objects in the landscape. A thrush in a tree near the old house commenced wonderful music.

Daylight brought renewed activity. Crowds from the city swelled the ranks of the watchers through the night, surprised to learn that Egan had held out through the hours.

I suddenly realized I was exhausted from the excitement and lack of sleep and food. And when breakfast was brought to the attackers and again I thought of Egan up there fighting for his strange inhuman life, I realized that every hour he kept up his defense successfully made that moment of capture or death more lamentable. I

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found I didn't want to be in at the kill after all. Egan was fighting too good a fight.

I cantered back to the show-grounds.

The lot was quiet and misty with the dank callowness of early dawn. I swung around to the rear of the horse-tent wondering how many of the boys were similar truants.

I glanced into the arena.

Jim was there. He was seated again on the lowest tier of seats. And he was not asleep. He was staring straight ahead into the glorious color of the east, his knuckles at his cheekbones, his hat pulled slightly over his eyes, a drooping dead cigaret in his lips.

"Well?" he said as he saw me. "Have they—have they got him yet? Don't I still hear occasional shots?"

"He can't hold out much longer, Jim," said I. "After the nerve-racking siege he's had and the bully battle he's put up against such hopeless numbers, it's a shame to think of him as finally being butchered. After all, Jim, never mind what he's done, he's still a human being with feelings just like yours and mine."

"Yes," said Jim with a slight hitch in his voice. "I always did like Egan, Billie. As I've been sitting here through the night thinking over them old range days and remembering him like I used to know him back over the years, I been reasoning it out, Billie, that after all, Egan isn't wholly to blame for what he's done. Seems to me that a really just God would sort of charge up a portion of his crime to that dirty New England skunk that cheated him in the matter of his girl.

"Of course a court of law would consider such an excuse nonsense. But there's a moral law in this world, too, Billie, and if I was running this world I'd certainly see that the man, Chase, got a slice of Egg's bitter portion for helping him get his crooked start."

"Well," said I, "philosophizing won't save Egan's neck. He's in for it. He's got to take his medicine."

Somehow that seemed to arouse Jim. He looked at me, then up at the golden east where the tattoo of gunshots was coming over the soft morning.

"Billie," he said in harsh voice, "I simply can't stand it any longer. I got to do my duty."

"Your duty? What duty?"

"You don't understand. But you will. I've always been a law-abiding man. I believe in the law. But under the circumstances I believe it's right for me to take matters into my own hands."

"What are you talking about, Jim? What is it you think of doing?"

"Rescuing Egan," said Jim with his machine-gun deadliness.

III

WE RODE to the battle in silence. The desperate man was still unconquered in the gable.

Jim stopped his horse out of danger. He dismounted. He crept to where the sheriff was hiding, directing his men.

"You're making no progress here," he declared. "What's it worth to you to take this man alive without further fussing?"

"Who are you?"

"A friend of Egan's—a friend he's got confidence in."

"Can you get him?"

"I can."

"How?"

"At the price of a truce."

"What kind of truce? What do you intend to do? Start something to help him get away?"

"I'd like to kill you for that. But I won't. I possess influence with this man. If you will stop firing, I'll go in and get him."

"Bring him out?"

"Yes."

"How do I know it?"

"Stop firing and find out. I want a chance to talk to him without all this artillery drowning my voice. Then I'll go in after him. You will see. You fellows can keep your same positions. If you see us running, start the bombardment again. You've got everything to gain and nothing to lose."

"What's your game? What do you get out of it?"

"That's my business."

"Who are you——?"

"A rider in the Carstock show, playing this place today."

"And all you want us to do is to stop firing until you have the chance to go in and bring this man out?"

"That's it."

"What can you possibly do?"

"Five minutes' conversation with him

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will convince him he should come down and give himself up. If it doesn't, and you hear a gunshot, come up and get him."

The sheriff considered for a moment.

"All right," said he. "Go ahead and see what you can do."

He passed the word down the long circular line for the firing to stop. Jim pulled his hat over his eyes. He placed his great hands to his mouth, megaphone fashion.

It took five minutes for word to pass completely around that ring that all sniping should cease. When a fair degree of silence had been secured amid the confusion, Jim shouted:

"It's me, Jim Knott, Egg, and I'm coming in. Don't shoot, Egg, I want to confab. I'm putting my life in your hands, Egg. I give you my word, everything is on the level."

Those who expected a reply from the roof were disappointed.

"Remember the kid in the prickly pear, Egg, and don't shoot."

Again there was no reply from the roof. But Egan's gun was quiet.

"Are you going to risk your life with that chap on nothing more than that?" demanded the sheriff.

"Yes. But it doesn't rest half so much on Egan's treachery as it does on yours. I have your word, of course that there will be no more firing until I reappear."

"I suppose so."

"Suppose so won't do. I want your promise, your word and your bond."

"All right."

I appreciated as much as Jim did the risks he was taking in crossing No Man's Land in entering the old house. But he did not shirk. He reared himself into view and started forward. For one tense moment we watched him with hearts at a standstill to learn if the truce was to be accepted by the other side.

Jim crossed the yard in safety.

He went up the steps of the dilapidated structure and disappeared within.

The house was deadly quiet after Jim disappeared. One, two, three, four, five minutes ticked away. The tension became unbearable. Ears were strained for the impact of the gunshot which would be a signal for them to pour in and assist at the kill. Eyes were riveted on the upper floor of the house where at any moment the light overcoat might appear.

My position squarely in front of the structure gave me a complete view of all that occurred, the more so because I did not rush forward the moment the tension snapped.

First came a cry from the second story. It was followed by the signal of a gunshot.

Instantly the deed was done, the big head and shoulders of Jim Knott appeared in the aperture.

"Come up here, quick—everybody!" he cried to the excited yardful below.

They needed no second invitation. The house was mobbed. When the first fury of the rush had expended itself, the first man to come away was a medium-sized civilian dressed in a neat business suit and a golf cap.

"Let me through," he begged them. "I've got to get a doctor, and get him quick."

The crowd gave way for him. I offered him my mount to facilitate his errand. He got on the horse quickly and rode away. Then I turned my attention to the house myself. Choosing a broken window which the crowd seemed to have overlooked in their rush for the doors, I vaulted in. The stairs packed with a mass of men until they seemed in danger of giving away. I detoured through the rooms of the old house and found some back stairs.

Two or three minutes of quick examination and a great rent in a back bed-room ceiling, brought me to the attic. I leaped the unfloored rafters and descended on the roomful of men in the second story from above. I dropped down through the same hole through which the desperado had climbed to his perch where he had fought off his attackers so successfully during the long stretch of hours.

Jim stood in the center of the room. The wall of grim faces made by the entering men filled the door and western side, but there was no desperado.

"Where's Egan?" demanded the sheriff.

"Oh," said Jim, "the man pared down to one suit of clothes and went for a doctor. His nerves were pretty well shattered, and I told him he had better consult a nerve specialist right away."

There was an exclamation of dismay from the crowd. The sheriff gave vent to a prodigious oath.

"Egan," exclaimed some one, "has made another getaway!"

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"You helped him to do it," exclaimed the sheriff. "Fifty thousand dollars has slipped through my fingers on account of you. You come with me as the conspirator in aiding that man to escape."

"All right," agreed Jim, "but you are going to have a fine time proving your case. In the first place you have got no evidence except your own word that the man in the gable was Egan at all. But granting that he was Egan and that Egan was guilty of all of his alleged crimes, you have got to admit that you parted very accommodatingly and allowed him to pass through and escape. I am afraid your evidence would only make you the laughing-stock of the county if you attempted prosecution."

"If he was not Egan, why did he barricade himself in here and act the way he did?"

"That," replied Jim, "I refuse to explain. Only one who knows Egan's story as I know it would have the mercy for him which I have."

But the sheriff arrested Jim and took him back to town. He was discharged that afternoon for lack of evidence.

LATE that night Jim and I sat dangling our feet over the side of one of the stock cars as our show-train pulled out of Texas.

"Jim," said I, "there's lots of things about this little episode that go against my grain. On the level now, was it just the right thing to do to aid Egan to escape?"

"Jim," said he, "judging from the circumstantial evidence, it was not. But, Jim, I judged Egan's case on a different and fairer basis than any result which could possibly come from an ordinary court of law. In the section that I come from and among the people I have always lived with, a man's word is his bond. In those wild and woolly days, a man was either a liar and a scoundrel or he was not. We learned to depend absolutely on a man's word."

"Well," said I.

"Egan was my friend. After he rescued me from the prickly pear, I came to know him well. Regardless of all his other traits, he never broke his word. He prized his word as much as his life, for it represented his standing in the community and among his fellows. After these robberies began with a note tacked to each one, I became suspicious.

"One night in riding the line I came on an old deserted prospector's shack on the edge of the desert. Egan was in there. I gave him my word that I would not tell where he was. He put himself in my hands. I never betrayed that confidence. But in that night we spent together I told Egan about the notes. And then and there I satisfied myself the man was guiltless. Billie, he never learned to write a word in his life!"

"Well," I said again.

"Six months afterward, alone in an open country, I encountered Chase. Shots were exchanged, Billie, and I plugged him. He thought he was going to die. He confessed that he did the work and then passed out. You recollect there have been no crimes charged up to Egan in the last twenty years. I left him lying there on the desert."

"And so——"

"And so there's nothing to clear Egan but my word—and a man's word alone in this day and age, Billie, I am sorry to say, doesn't count. I have no proofs to give the authorities that at the same time would not incriminate me in the gun-play with Chase out in the chapparal twenty years ago. Few indeed are the boys in a life like this who have not had something in their past they are perfectly willing to have forgotten in the same time and place where it occurred."

"And that's the truth, Jim?"

"That's the solemn truth, Billie. Poor Egan!"

Somehow in that moment I felt a greater admiration for this man whose word was as good as his bond and who stood by a friend so resolutely over the score of years.

The lights of the city hung low in our rear. The show-train clicked on into the night. Jim sighed.

"Well," said he, "that pays a little on account for what he did for me on the prickly pear flat twenty-eight years ago."

My eyes roamed the great darkness of the night world about us. Somewhere off over the miles, the strange pathetic Egan was free again—but wandering, wandering, wandering!

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THE CALL OF THE JUNGLE

BY CLYDE B. HOUGH

Author of "Darcy Deserts."

MISS MADELINE GODARD, comfortably quartered at Manila, decided to visit her brother who was Lieutenant Godard, Commanding Officer at Subong. Subong being a one-company post, stuck down in a small clearing at the western end of Monaga Pass. Monaga Pass, in turn, being a gash across Mt. Iriga and a few miles east of Pasacao, a small coast town in southern Luzon.

Had Miss Godard gone to Pasacao by boat, the moderate distance from there inland, to the post, would have been easy and safe with her brother and his company for escort. But, because she was studying the natives and their language, she chose to make the long, hard trip overland with a small escort and a guide who turned out to be treacherous. She was captured just one-day's march from the end of her journey—spirited away in the night and not missed until morning.

For weeks the surrounding country was scoured and combed. Troops were sent from Lipas and Batangas and the search was minute, but Miss Godard was not found. Though a Filipino was picked up in the hills and recognized by members of the girl's escort as her former guide.

At first the Filipino refused to answer questions. But later, under pressure of strenuous persuasion, he admitted that he had managed the abduction and jeeringly told the lieutenant that his sister was dead. She had gotten possession of a *kris*, he said, and that had been the end. And since he stuck to this story to the last, even in the face of the firing squad, it was assumed that Miss Godard had liberated herself in the only way possible. Under the circumstances such an act was highly probable. So the search was abandoned and the troops returned to their respective posts.

After that Godard virtually ignored his command and kept to his quarters, sullen with grief. The men, left to themselves, ate heavily, took no exercise, smoked much and sweated out the days and nights on their cots. These, of course, were precisely the things they should not have done. It was the dry season and they were hemmed in by the jungle.

In the morning the sun came up out of the jungle and in the evening it went down into the jungle. At night, out of the jungle came strange, weird cries and up from its darkest recesses huge vampire-bats flapped into space, flitted their grotesque moon-shadows athwart the camp and left depression in their wake.

In short, to the men at Subong, the jungle was become a converging menace.

That is to all save Kirk. From the first the jungle had affected him differently from the others. At the same time it began to creep in on them, it began to lure him. And the spell grew and the mystery

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of Beyond beckoned until Kirk had an impelling desire to plunge into that vast wilderness and go on and on. He tried, with occupation, to crowd this longing out. He would take the trumpeter's bugle, go to the edge of the little clearing and practise service calls for hours. And most of all did he practise the "call to arms."

He liked that: its long-drawn, high-keyed first note, set to catch attention: and the quick rushing action the whole call suggested. It was thrilling, it was the echo of some wild strain in his own make-up. It carried a suggestion of stirring adventure that might be waiting out there, beyond the limit. So Kirk's bugle practise only served to increase the jungle's lure and the lure grew to be an obsession.

And then the crisis came. It came, too, with all the startling swiftness of real melodrama. Shortly after dark, one evening, Kirk rose from his cot and without word or warning, walked to the back end of quarters. jerked down a fire-ax and crossed to a corner where was the locked door to the quartermaster stores. One blow, with the pick at the back of the ax, gouged out the lock. He threw the door open and walked in. The other men lay on their cots, heads propped on elbows and watched, silent, fascinated.

They could see Kirk moving about in the semi-darkness of the storeroom and they were intensely interested in what he was doing, what he would do next and what he would finally do. But not in the results. Their minds did not reach that far. To them it was a play and they were the audience and they waited breathlessly for the climax. It did not occur to them to stop Kirk. What audience would stop the play and cheat itself of the climactical thrills?

In a few minutes Kirk came out. At his side hung a haversack filled with cartridges, around his waist was a belt and every cell was full. Still carrying the ax he stopped at the arms rack, smashed the lock, took a rifle and bayonet and walked through the door that led out of quarters. Five minutes and he was swallowed up by the jungle.

"T'e bloomin' idjot," said "Cockney" Simpkins, to no one in particular. "An' 'is time hexpired hin six weeks."

Coming fresh from lighted quarters into the darkness of matted foliage, Kirk was able to see but poorly, so he tore his face and hands cruelly on brambles and horny shrubs. Still he worried on for several hours, staggering, falling, bleeding and cursing. At last he lay down between two clumps of bamboo with interlacing tops and slept, while all around the jungle creatures chattered and buzzed their disapproval of the intruder.

It is more than probable that no attempt was made to follow Kirk that night; surely it would have been foolish, futile. Godard may have ordered out a searching party the next day but if he did Kirk never saw or heard them.

Kirk rose early the next morning to the chatter of monkeys and the piping of birds. Some mangoes and a large pomelo constituted his breakfast; after which he set out to put distance between himself and Subong. The matter of distance was much in his mind for the next few days with the result that he bored many miles into the jungle.

When, at last, he felt himself safe his next care was to find a soft stone and whet the blade of his bayonet to a cutting edge. In Kirk's day bayonets were made of the best steel but they were not made with sharp edges and a cutting implement is essential in the jungle.

He was now in a virgin wilderness, vast and incomparable. Here, nature reigned supreme, had reigned for centuries not numbered. Often Kirk spent says in working his way around some seemingly endless stretch of swamp lilies. At other times he loafed for days on the banks of some still lake whose ebony waters were peopled with snakes, moss-grown logs and monstrous water lizards. And yet again he came upon huge natural arbors wherein the dew never dried and fungi hung from decayed branches in marvelous variegation.

And always he had a feeling of intimacy with these things, a dim sense of having known the like before. Even living on wild fruit, berries and roots—as he was obliged to do—seemed a remotely familiar habit. And what the average man would have counted the hardships of such a life were pleasures to Kirk. He was spell-bound, beauty-drunk; this was his kingdom, the place he had searched the earth to find.

For him, far and alone in that vast jungle, the world had turned young again. The obligations and burdens of civilization, gathered with the centuries, slipped from his shoulders and he knew primeval freedom.

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SO FAR his general direction had been south and parallel to the mountain range. But suddenly, for some inexplicable whim, he turned east and began to climb the more niggardly steeps of Mt. Iriga. Here wild fruit was less plentiful and the soft roots that he found so nourishing in the lowland were not to be had. Still he kept resolutely on and upward. And one day he stumbled square into a cave. He never would have found it other than by accident, for the entrance, overhung by a large boulder and grown about with vines and shrubbery, was invisible twenty steps away.

The place was dark inside and Kirk had no matches, so he resorted to primitive methods to get fire. He took dead, dry grass and ground it between his hands till he had a small heap of fine chaff. Then, over the chaff, he held a hard stone and struck it a sharp blow with the back of his bayonet. A spark fell, a few dry twigs he added, and the cave was soon brightly lighted, to the consternation of numerous bats and other dark-loving creatures.

This cave was about half-way up to Iriga's summit and here Kirk rested for two days. And while plundering among the clefts in the walls he found a small, silver bugle of the type regulation in the Spanish army. It was probably left there by some small detachment of Spanish soldiers who, at some time, hid in the cave to elude pursuing natives. At any rate the bugle was a pleasant find for Kirk.

He stuffed its bell with leaves, so that the sound would not carry to any great distance —one never knows when the Filipino is near—and thrilled again to his favorite call, the "call to arms." And when he left the cave and started, once more, on his journey the little silver bugle hung at his belt.

As Kirk drew near the mountain-top things edible grew scarce and water became a problem. It was not pleasant up here like it was down in the lowland; he felt peevish and weak. Decidedly something was wrong. Yet he had no thought of going back; some streak of tenacity in him would not let him quit till he had reached the summit of Mt. Iriga. He sat down to rest; and upon looking up the slope saw a species of mountain goat making its way downward.

It was the first game he had seen on the trip and all at once he realized what was wrong; he had eaten no meat for three weeks. He rose, rested his rifle on a boulder and took careful aim. The goat rolled over and over down-hill and lodged in a lava-rift not ten feet from where Kirk stood. He found a thin, flat stone, placed it in the center of a sizable pile of brush and started a fire. By the time he had the goat skinned the stone was hot enough to fry meat.

It was late in the afternoon when Kirk finished his feast, so he camped for the night. The next morning he ate a hearty breakfast of goat meat and with renewed strength and vigor again started up the rugged slope. But as the fierce sun climbed up in the east Kirk became thirsty, terribly thirsty, and he looked in every nook and cranny for water. But everywhere he was marked for disappointment and his thirst grew and his tongue became thick and fuzzy. He sat down in despair and began to chew green twigs and from that sprung an idea.

The thing that he had thought of, is of course, not new. But to Kirk it was original, positively a discovery. He jumped up, drew his bayonet, frantically, and "boxed" a tree. To his great joy the cup, thus formed, slowly filled with clear sap. Kirk drank it with a leaf and the problem of water was solved. That night he slept on the very apex of the summit.

The next morning Kirk was surprised at the difference between Iriga's eastern and western sides. On the west, from whence he came, only a few scattering trees clung, here and there, in the dry lava. But to the east, the early morning sun played its brilliant rays on a verdant slope, well studded with trees and slashed with sparkling streamlets.

Less than a mile to the south, clustered down among the trees, was a small *barrio*. Kirk decided to investigate the place at close range, so he turned to the western slope and, keeping below the ridge on that side, made his way south till he was opposite the *barrio*. Then slowly, carefully, with his rifle ready, he crawled up and peeped over the ridge.

About thirty paces from where he lay hid was a lone shack, apparently unoccupied. There was no sound or movement about it, so Kirk gave it but little thought and started to move on to a better view of the *barrio* which stretched away farther down the slope. Then his eye wandered back

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to the shack and at a small window with bamboo bars across it, he saw the face of a white woman. He crawled nearer and raised his head above the shrubbery. The woman saw him and pressed her finger to her lips in the sign for silence, then turned away from the window. Kirk guessed, even then, who she was. In a few minutes she came back.

"No one is near," she said, "but we must talk very low. I am Madeline God—"

"I know it," he interrupted. "I am Private Kirk from your brother's company at Subong. Can you get out of that shack?"

"No. The door is fastened on the outside and the bars across the window, as you can see, are woven into the thatching."

"Where is the door?"

"On the opposite side and facing the *barrio*."

"You'll have to get out by the window," Kirk decided. "Do they keep a guard over you at night?"

"After about ten o'clock. There is a small porch at the door and one of them brings his mat and sleeps there."

"Then we'll have to get started as soon as it is dark. What time do they give you supper?"

"About dark and whoever brings it always hurries away to his own supper."

"That's good," said Kirk, "it will give us three hours' start. They are not likely to miss you till the fellow comes on guard. I'll come this evening, shortly before dark, and wait till the gugu brings your supper and leaves. Then we'll get busy."

"But how will you manage it?"

"I haven't figured it yet," he told her, "but I'll have a way doped out by night. In the meantime, sleep if you can. There's hiking to be done tonight. And now we had better stop talking before we are heard."

Kirk settled down and studied the situation for some time; then he crept to his own side of the ridge and found a safe place to pass the day. First he spent an hour putting a fresh edge on his bayonet and after that stretched out and slept.

A LITTLE before dark the man was back at his station near the girl's prison. After a short wait he saw a native bring her supper and then leave the shack. He crawled forward and stood up by the barred window, the bottom of which was at the height of his shoulders. The girl was there, tense and breathless, her face pressed against the bars.

"You go eat all they gave you," said Kirk. "You'll need it before you see Subong."

For the space of three minutes he stood watching and listening. Then, satisfied, he lengthened the sling-strap and slung his rifle across his back, drew his bayonet, cut the thatching loose at one end of the bars and one by one pulled them from their place. By the time Kirk had the last bar out, Miss Godard, her supper finished, was waiting and, at his direction, put her hands on his shoulders and sprang through the window.

The moon was up and the stars out, so the man and the girl crawled on hands and knees till they were below the ridge on the western side of the summit. Then they crouched in the moon-shade of a boulder and listened to learn if they were followed.

"They may and they may not follow us tonight," Kirk said, "but they are sure to be on our trail in the morning. Still they are going to have a lot of trouble and lose a lot of time following our trail on this dry lava. At that it's going to be a close run. Think you can hike all night and the most of tomorrow?"

"I believe I can," she said firmly. "I have taken exercise every day and am in good condition."

They both knew the value of conserving their energy, so they refrained even from the questions that each was curious to ask and spoke only when absolutely necessary. Thus, in comparative silence, they pursued their way down the slope, Miss Godard walking at Kirk's side with a swinging step as springy as his own. Behind them was the menace of savage pursuit, before them a vast, untracked wilderness and yet they were cheerful, undaunted.

It was long after midnight when Kirk touched the girl's arm and stepped quickly behind a large boulder.

"Walk on for a little way," he whispered, "then stop and talk as though you were talking to me."

Perhaps it was five minutes Kirk waited, bayonet "fixed" and rifle at the "ready," then they came in sight, one behind the other, padding along with the stealth of wolves. Presently, Kirk joined Miss Godard,

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gingerly "unfixed" his bayonet and wiped the weapon with a handful of leaves while the girl shuddered and looked on in silence.

"Two," said Kirk after a few moments. "And one of them had a rifle. Funny they didn't take a shot at me. With me out of the way the two of them would have stood a good show to recapture you."

"They didn't want to take the chance of hitting me nor the risk of the fight that I would make with your rifle, even though they did get you. They know I can shoot and they want me alive and unharmed. You see, a Moro *datto* was to have paid them a large sum of money for me. I guess they didn't know that I understood their language, for they discussed the deal in my shack when the *datto's* agent came to look me over. He would have taken me then only he didn't have enough money with him, so he had to go back to Zamboanga and get more from his *datto.*"

"The devils," exclaimed Kirk. "I'm sure glad I happened along just when I did."

"You saved my life just as surely as though you had pulled me out of the ocean, for I certainly would have found some way to end it before surrendering to such a fate."

"Perhaps," said Kirk. "At any rate you are saving my life right now and will save it for several days to come. For it's plain they'll not fire on me as long as I keep reasonably close to you. And by the same token I'm going to be your shadow till we get to Subong."

They both laughed a little and resumed their march in silence, as before. They kept steadily on for several hours and finally the full moon, a silver shield, swung down below the western horizon and one by one, the celestial lamplighter turned off the lesser lights. Then the sun, a great ball of burning energy, rolled itself up above the mountain peaks and poured fire into the lava and soon the breeze blew hot on the faces of Kirk and Miss Godard. And the spring began to go out of the girl's step and the continual shock of receiving her weight on the downward step against the hard, sloping lava-surface was making her arches ache bitterly.

Though she said no complaining word, nor did she mention her greatest trouble—the thirst. However Kirk noticed her repeated efforts to moisten her parched lips with a tongue that was equally dry; and he began to watch for one of the green-barked, soft trees that gave sap so freely.

Kirk soon found the kind of tree he was looking for and after he had "boxed" it, laid some boughs in the shade for Miss Godard to rest on while the sap was dripping. Then, when enough sap had run, he showed the girl how to drink it with a leaf.

"Don't swallow much of it," Kirk cautioned her. "If you do it will make you vomit. Just moisten your throat and mouth well and that will last you till we reach water, which will be late this afternoon. In the meantime, let's start as soon as you can. For the gugus are, doubtless, coming on behind and gaining on us every minute."

"I am ready now," was Miss Godard's only answer.

From the first she had followed Kirk's plans and advice without question or hesitation. She even liked his faintly dictatorial way of telling her what to do. In fact she secretly admired this private soldier from her brother's company, this man turned primitive, who had roamed alone, without civilized food, in a tropic jungle.

Late that afternoon they found water, just as Kirk had predicted. It was a small spring bubbling up through a seam in the lava; and they carefully and gradually satisfied their thirst. Then Kirk turned his campaign hat inside out and filled it with berries for the girl and while she ate he, also, made a meal of the same fruit at the near-by vines.

AFTER they had eaten their fill and drank again of the clear, sweet water, Kirk and Miss Godard stood just above the little spring and watched a golden sun ease slowly down into a vast, green sea of foliage that stretched away from the lower slopes of Mt. Iriga.

"Wasn't it glorious?" asked Kirk when the last edge of sun had slipped from view.

His voice was muffled with emotion and he gave a sigh of regret.

Miss Godard looked at the man, speculatively, for some minutes and then asked abruptly.

"Kirk, why are you here?"

She waved her hand at their general surroundings.

"The jungle called me and I just had to answer. That's the only reason I know," said Kirk. "Ever since I was fourteen

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years old I've been going somewhere, but I never knew where till I came into the jungle——"

"Funny," he resumed after a short silence, "how people generally think of a tropic jungle as a steaming, putrid death-mesh. Perhaps it is because of the writers. They picture it that way. And they are partly right, but only partly so, for they show only a part of the picture. Oh, if I were a painter and able to reproduce the colors, the blends and harmonies I have seen here in this, supposed, death-mesh. But conventional art would reject such colors—brand them 'unnatural, unreal'. Isn't it strange? The realist tabus the really 'real,' and the seeker after the natural ignores what is naturally 'natural'."

It was the longest speech the girl had heard from Kirk and likewise it was entirely different from what she would have expected from him. She had been wont to think of him as a sort of modernized and very capable cave-man. But never had she thought of him as a lover of art, and least of all as a man who had opinions on that very fine subject. However Kirk did not leave her long to wonder at this side of his nature.

"It's getting dark now," he told her in his usual matter-of-fact tone, "and there's a cave not far from here. I ran into it on my way up. There is not a chance in a hundred that the gugus will ever find this cave, the way it is located. I only found it by accident. So we'll stay there a couple of days and get a good rest and by that time the gugus will have, most likely, given up and gone back to their *barrio*."

Shortly before midnight, Kirk, watching in the entrance to the cave, heard the natives prowling around outside and calling softly to one another as they searched for the sign of a trail. But the white man had taken care of that. As hard and sharp as the lava was, Kirk and Miss Godard had taken off their shoes and walked to the cave in their stockings. So the natives found no trail nor did they find the cave, but finally to Kirk's immense relief, they moved on down the mountainside.

Late the next afternoon the man and the girl saw their pursuers going back up the mountain. They had given up the chase. Still Kirk and Miss Godard ventured out of the cave only long enough to get water and berries. And it was not until the morning of the third day that they started again for Subong.

It was midafternoon of the fifth day after leaving the cave when they became aware that the natives were once more on their trail. Kirk knew that to stop and fire on them would only give them a chance to gain distance. He knew, also, that he was not far from Subong. If he could only make them hear at the post, they would come out and meet him. He snatched the little bugle from his belt, pressed it to his lips and forced all the breath in his longs through the small, silver coils. The "call to arms" rang clear and sharp on the still air.

He had heard an old trumpeter say that a bugle could be heard eight miles under favorable air conditions. The air was still and clear, they were less than four miles from Subong and Kirk had hopes. He took the girl by the hand and broke into a run, but she was tired and handicapped by her skirt and the natives continued to gain on them. Kirk stopped, knelt, and with three shots stopped two who were getting uncomfortably close. Then he gathered the girl in his arms, swung her off the ground and ran on.

It was a situation very like to loose the romantic impulse in any woman. And it did just that to Madeline Godard. She forgot the social gulf that lay between herself, the sister of an officer, and Kirk a private soldier. She forgot, even, their imminent danger. She knew, only, that she desired to caress this man, her man; her protecting male. She locked her arms about his neck, raised her face to his and kissed him again and again on mouth, cheek and forehead. Then she took her arms from his neck and wrapped them about her own crimson face.

Too dazed and too near exhausted to realize the significance of the girl's action, Kirk ran on with bursting lungs and aching arms. After he had been running for some centuries and the world had begun to turn black, Kirk heard a single, faint blast on a bugle; and the sound came from the direction of Subong. They had heard. They were coming. They were calling for an answering blast to guide them. Kirk felt as though a couple of planets had been lifted from his shoulders. He stood the girl on her feet and fought a minute for breath. Then he raised the bugle to his

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lips and, by a supreme effort, blew a long, clear blast. The answer was instant and much closer than before.

The natives knew the meaning of this interchange of calls and they made a final dash to get the man and girl before it was too late.

Kirk and Miss Godard ran again for a little way and then stopped. It was no use, the natives were closing in on them from three sides. It was time to make a fight. Kirk knelt and began a deadly play of steel-clad lead on their pursuers. Some of the natives fell but more of them continued to close in. It was only a matter of minutes now until Kirk would be dead, his brains hammered out, and Miss Godard a prisoner to face that other and more terrible fate. At this critical juncture the company from Subong swirled onto the scene and the would-be captors of Kirk and Miss Godard were quickly made prisoners.

IN FRONT of the quarters at Subong, Lieutenant Godard swung the men from column of fours front and brought them to a halt with a snap and a ring in his commands that had been his chief characteristic before the abduction of his sister. And the men responded to his spirit with surprising alacrity. The little romp with the Filipinos had broken the monotony for them, had cleared and refreshed their mental atmosphere. They published the fact in every movement. The lieutenant dismissed them and they went laughing and rollicking into quarters.

"Kirk," said the lieutenant, "thanks are too puny to offer for a service such as you have done for me. However I shall hope for an opportunity to prove my gratitude. Your discharge papers came down on the last boat, and, of course if you re-enlist here in my company there is a sergeantcy for you."

"Thank you, sir," said Kirk. "I don't think I shall enlist again, but I would like to have my discharge now, if I may."

"Why—er, certainly. Just come over to my quarters," said the lieutenant, puzzled by Kirk's request.

Five minutes later, with his discharge in his haversack, Kirk left the lieutenant's quarters. It was dark now and he leaned on his rifle in the deeper darkness under a banana tree and watched and listened. Bright, cheering light streamed through the open windows of the men's quarters. Snatches of song and light-hearted laughter, also floated out from those windows. Even Lieutenant Godard was whistling a merry tune while he hustled about his quarters. Contentment reigned over the little post at Subong.

The moon showed an edge above the tall coconut trees, the great, black vampires began to flap into space and innumerable cries echoed through the wilderness. Kirk shouldered his rifle, crossed the small clearing and disappeared in the jungle.

THE DESERT

BY MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

WHEN day has left her, and the friendly sun,
Wide-eyed and staring, in the silence deep,
At night the desert lies; she can not sleep
For thinking of the murders she has done.

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The CAMP-FIRE

A FREE-TO-ALL MEETING-PLACE for READERS WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS

TWO interesting lines of information from a Nova Scotian comrade, in response to questions previously asked by some of you:

Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

A few issues back you had an inquiry as to the feasibility of crossing the Atlantic alone, in a boat. Some of your readers in Gloucester, Mass., can give you detailed information regarding "Centennial" Johnson, who did this in 1876, and Howard Blackburn, who made the crossing in 1900. Blackburn's journey is made especially noteworthy by the fact that he had lost nearly all his fingers from frost-bite while astray in a dory on the Banks some years before.

You also had an inquiry as to the meaning of the African "Tagati." Rider Haggard uses it in the sense of "bewitched." If you can locate Edward A. Owens, who worked at Drake's bakery in Roxbury, Mass., ten years ago, and previous to that served some time in the Rhodesian Mounted Police (this may not be the official name of the corps), he may be able to tell you something.—A. A. MORRISON.

SOME time ago I received from one of our New Zealand comrades an interesting letter intended for our Camp-Fire. Unfortunately, though I hate to say it about any man, our friend's handwriting is almost as bad as my own. So I held his letter till I could send him a typewritten copy for him to go over and correct as to our misreadings and doubts, particularly as to proper names.

Though I've waited some time, the corrected copy has not come and I'm risking giving you our very doubtful "translation" of the letter. Probably his answer or my inquiry has gone astray somewhere in the thousands of miles between us and, as another exchange would take a couple of months, here goes:

Masterton, New Zealand.

This is a yarn of the good old days before the *pakeha* came much to our shores—when we ate those we conquered in our tribal wars—and, when meat ran short and no fight was toward, we killed a fat and young slave for the larder—*Ai!* Those days are gone forever and our young men train no more to fight the tribes' quarrels, but sit in the shade of some totara tree and drink liquor. An occasional whaler seeking to fill up with mats, carved woodwork, dried heads or greenstone (jade) weapons or ornaments after an unsuccessful cruise was our only visitor from the blue seas and the lands beyond.

BUT to my tale—the greatest of all our Maori chiefs was Te Raupara, often called by the *pakehas* the Maori Napoleon. At the time of which I write he was installed on the Island of Kapiti just on the southwest coast of the N. Island of Te Roto Aaua (N. Z.) and had conquered all his enemies to the north and south with the exception of Taumaranui, a Rantira on Banks Peninsula where Akaroa now stands. Three times had Te Raupara's war canoes dared the raging straits in new endeavor to bring Taumaranui and his tribe to their knees, and three times had the vigilance of the scouts of the Southern Ranitira foiled their efforts by giving the tribe timely warning to retreat. Te Raupara had sworn by his *Atua* (God) that he would sooner or later make an example of Taumaranui, and his chance came thuswise:

ONE fine Summer's morning there sailed into the Bay of Kapiti, the brig *Elizabeth*, commanded by Captain Stewart and John McLean, first mate. Her holds were only half full, as the whales were not running, and she hoped to procure some trade from the natives to fill up her empty hatches.

On shore went Captain Stewart and had a long palaver with Te Raupara and the bargain was struck that for the use of the brig for six weeks, sailed by her own crew, the Maoris would give as much trade as Captain Stewart could take.

At dawn, five hundred dusky warriors, armed to the teeth, were in the hold of the ship and the vessel under way, heading toward Akaroa, with Te Raupara and his savage lieutenant, Te Kuiti, in the cabin. Taumaranui and his *hapu* (tribe) welcomed the appearance of the whaler, for did not the *pakeha* bring cloth and beads and guns and *waipiro* (strong drink) and exchange these commodities for what the natives had to offer in return?

THE first canoe that put off was welcomed on board and the crew were shown down into the hold. Soon after, the Chief Taumaranui, his wife, and daughter, a young girl about seventeen, were welcomed on board by Captain Stewart and shown down into the cabin. To them entered quickly, Te Raupara and Te Kuiti. Taumaranui knew then he was trapped. Te Raupara jeered at and mocked him, saying the wife would be thrown to the sharks, and the girl, after he had finished with her, would be given to the rank and file.

As Te Raupara and his lieutenant left the cabin to seek irons, Taumaranui spoke in a low tone to his wife, bidding her strangle the girl and hang herself, and, when Te Raupara returned, the room contained only Taumaranui and two corpses. Taumaranui

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was securely handcuffed and ironed and a hook with a string to the roof of the cabin put through the fleshy part of his throat so that only by standing on tip-toe could he ease the strain.

Te Raupara's five hundred warriors made short work of the defenseless and unsuspecting tribe, burned their *pah* and returned, the voyage back to Kapiti taking three days.

On arrival here the luckless Taumaranui was tortured to death with red-hot ramrods.

CAPTAIN STEWART, claiming his promised cargo as hire for the use of his ship, was consigned to the Hot Place and the brig *Elizabeth* sailed for home half empty. A week later a King's ship called at Kapiti for water and the story of Taumaranui's death was told. Eighteen days later the *Elizabeth* was summoned to stop by a shot across her bows from *H. M. S. Bon Adventure* and a boat manned by blue-jackets and a lieutenant boarded her. The lieutenant was precise and formal:

"This is the brig *Elizabeth*, Captain Stewart commander?"

"Yes."

"Are you Captain Stewart?"

"I am."

"Take him, men; also the mate."

And in less than five minutes Captain Stewart and McLean were swinging at the yard-arm. A fitting end for such dastards.—FRONTIERSMAN 6980 L. F.

HAVE a look at these figures showing what the American people are, based on the last census, 1910. Don't they give you something to think about? Doesn't it seem to you that, when we've earned peace by uncompromising victory, there will be some man-sized problems for us to handle here at home?

Native parentage, white . .	.50,240,000	54%
Foreign " " . .	.12,950,000	14%
Foreign born	.13,400,000	15%
Mixed parentage	. 6,000,000	5%
Negro	. 9,830,000	11

SCALPING. Here we are again. First some reports gleaned by D. Wiggins from old-timers in his vicinity:

Salem, Ore.

In regard to the scalping problem have been making inquiries.

Close to my home live three old frontiersmen, and I applied to all of them to learn whether they had ever heard or known directly of any one who had survived scalping. I refer to a complete recovery, of course, not a lingering death of several days.

MR. F. A. THOMPSON, who helped solve the Little Crow problem in the great massacre in '63 said he had seen one young squaw who had been scalped in an inter-tribal raid and had recovered completely. Mr. Tompkins, who was out in the Western Territories in the early and unsettled times, met in Pierre in '76 a man who had been scalped two years previously. He was all right then, however. Uncle Jim Hall did not know of a single instance that came under his immediate observation of a scalping victim living, but had heard of a few cases. He did not seem to have any great faith in them, however.

I am not able to get to any of the writers on the old frontier, such as Gen. Dodge, etc., so can not say just how they regard the matter. But I think it was a very unusual occurrence for any one who had been so pruned by the red brother to live to lecture on it.

Both men who are mentioned as having seen the persons scalped told me that a piece of skin about the size of a silver dollar has been taken from the exact top of the head, the scalp-lock being located there.—D. WIGGINS.

P. S.—The odd character of whom I recently wrote you, "Injun Dave" Sitler, lived in Ohio instead of Iowa, as I stated. He was drowned by the capsizing of his canoe in the 40's, I understand. I do not know what became of the peculiar string of trophies the Indian he killed had kept.—D. W.

DO YOU remember one of Edgar Young's stories, "A Spur for a Jaded Nag," published a year or so ago? About a down-and-out beach-combing American doctor in South America who, dragged part way back to decency by another American, manages to meet an emergency by performing a difficult operation though still a nervous wreck. Well, it stirred old memories in at least one of us and brought us the following letter.

Now it would seem, off-hand, as if our magazine must be responsible for starting a good many boys under eighteen or twenty out into the world adventuring. Doubtless it does help along in many cases, though in each one the tinder must already be there waiting for some final spark to touch it off. But I think that our magazine restrains as many of these cases as it starts. Particularly at our Camp-Fire and in "Ask Adventure" it is real adventurers who talk and the result is that the seamy as well as the glamorous side of actual adventuring is made pretty plain. We don't hold up adventuring as just a happy joy-ride.

AND I've noticed we do quite a bit in the way of pointing morals without doing any "preaching" and often without intention of even pointing a moral. For instance, in the old days when we had our "Wanted" department, do you remember how many expeditions carefully specified that they wanted no men who were "booze-fighters" and so on? The moral pointed had especially strong value because it not only wasn't "preaching" but was merely the businesslike statement of a lesson learned by hard experience—that booze and reliability don't generally travel far together

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even in adventurous undertakings, perhaps particularly in adventurous undertakings. You know how it is with boys—that kind of thing will register harder than sermons, especially when it comes from the real adventurers themselves.

TRUTH, I think, is always safe medicine in the long run and, since it gives the facts, instead of only the glamour, of adventuring, I feel our magazine need not worry. We keep it clean and we give facts and treat them as facts. Personally, I wouldn't give a hoot for the kind of virtue, or for the method of teaching virtue, that depends on keeping the subject's eyes blindfolded to facts, leaving him to meet these facts, as he *will* meet them sooner or later, ignorant, unwarned and unprepared. The ostrich system of facing the world is considerably lacking in common sense. And the tender and inflated virtue that tries to "shield" a young chap from sight or hearing of the dangers he'll surely have to face some day seems to me merely an empty bladder too full of wind for its own safety and for that of the young chap. Talking about evils and smacking your lips over them is one thing; treating them like any other facts is quite another matter.

Well, here's Captain Brand's letter and it happens that, when I asked him whether we could have it at Camp-Fire and over his own name, his reason for saying yes was that it might possibly help herd the young fellows away from some of the things the older hands have found don't pay.

La Crosse, Wis.

This is to congratulate Mr. Young and perhaps the following may be of interest to him:

TEN years ago I deserted the British bark *Randova* on account of the *pisco* that was given to me by the hoboes of the water-front. Having been apprenticed on his ship, Captain Ed. Shaw, a kind-hearted gentleman, tried his best to get me back. However, the beach-combers had their hands on me; their alluring tales of the gold so easily to be found in the mountains, together with the *pisco* that first fires you on and next makes you sluggish, seemed to me far better than the strenuous voyage on a windjammer homeward bound around Cape Horn.

However, to relate the experiences we had walking the railroad track before we hit Oroya would take too much space. In Oroya I was lucky enough to make a favorable impression on the train conductor, thanks to the little Spanish I had learned in school, thus securing a ride to Cerro de Pasco, leaving the rest of the party behind, for which I later had reason to thank my lucky star. Arrived in Cerro de Pasco, I got work but soon the altitude got me. If it would not have been for the kind-hearted American boys and especially for a German, named Schmidt, who ran a saloon in Smelter and passed the hat for me, I have my doubts about sitting here and writing this to-day.

However, on my return back to Lima, a kind-hearted lady who ran a boarding-house took me in and kept me until I signed articles on the liner *Setos*.

When I arrived home my father looked twice before he really believed that it was me, because my associates (the beach-combers) had found out that my parents were wealthy and had written black-mailing letters demanding five hundred pounds for my release. Dad had moved heaven and earth, besides the Consular officers, and had not found a trace of me.

NOW I have finished, it strikes me to know just what made me pick up the pen; however, it must be that Mr. Young, in writing fiction, struck almost one hundred per cent. of golden truth. Furthermore, it may give a little warning to the boys of the age from fifteen to seventeen, looking for adventure, to wait a little and consider hard if they hear anybody roar about the finding of gold, etc., and hear all you need to do is get there and pick it up. A little more thinking and a little less liquor will often save much worry and many tears.—CAPTAIN WM. R. P. BRAND.

I'VE heard that several hundred copies of our magazine go on board one American battle-ship every issue when she's where she can get them. It seems rather a large number for a crew, but of course I hope it's true. The man who told me is not a liar or even a fool, though anybody can get strung once in a while. On the other hand, it's certainly true that a large number of our Navy men, men and officers, are members of our Camp-Fire. The *Arkansas*, for example, seems to carry quite a few of us. I remember several letters not long ago from comrades aboard her and here's a greeting to Camp-Fire from one of her crew who had previously served on merchant ships. In a postscript he suggests that he'd be glad to hear from Camp-Fire comrades. We have his real name, of course, and will forward letters addressed to "Texas" in our care.

U. S. S. Arkansas.

I am writing you a few lines to let you know how I am getting along. Yes, I have been over and back quite a few times. It sure is an interesting game. playing with the subs. Yes, we lost in one game. It was the S.S. ——— (can't tell you what ship it was), but we got away. Believe me, brothers, New York sure does look good. Now, that's saying some.

Well, I'll close now as there isn't much to say. Wishing you all the luck in the world for those that are to go across, I remain, Sincerely, a brother, ——

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The Most Popular Stories in Our Magazine for 1917

IT IS late to be giving the results of our annual vote by readers on the ten most popular stories published in our magazine during 1917, but I've been out of the running on account of health during most of 1918 thus far and this is one of the things that didn't get done when it should have been done.

The prominent feature about the 1917 results is that the vote was far more widely distributed than on 1916, showing a much larger number of stories that registered hard with readers.

In the following a serial is indicated by (S), a novel by (N), a novelette by (n). In addition to the ten best are given, for honorable mention, the ten receiving the next highest number of votes:

1.	Penitentiary Post (N)—Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton	11,550
2.	Gaston Olaf and Big Business (S)—Henry Oyen	11,319
3.	Hira Singh's Tale (S)—Talbot Mundy	11,109
4.	The Petals of Lao Tse (N)—J. Allan Dunn	10,374
5.	Longhorns (N)—William Patterson White	9,954
6.	A Man and His Name (N)—Norman Springer	8,148
7.	Claymore (S)—Arthur D. Howden Smith	7,938
8.	Dangerous Men (N)—Gordon Young	6,531
9.	The Soul of a Regiment—Talbot Mundy	6,426
10.	Fire Mountain (S)—Norman Springer	6,195
11.	Finished (S)—H. Rider Haggard	5,922
12.	Rotorua Rex (S)—J. Allan Dunn	4,662
13.	The Ninth Man—Edgar Young	4,074
14.	The Damned Old Nigger—Talbot Mundy	4,032
15.	From the Seas (n)—J. Allan Dunn	3,989
16.	On the Account (n)—J. Allan Dunn	3,528
17.	Nobody's Island (N)—Beatrice Grimshaw	3,129
18.	The Epic of Silver King—Arthur James Hayes	3,066
19.	The Wave-Bound (N)—Samuel Alexander White	3,045
20.	Pikers Afloat (n)—Walt McDougall	2,814

Of course there are a good many factors that play a part in such a ranking of stories. A story read a month ago leaves on the mind a more vivid impression than does an equally good story read eleven months ago. A long story has the big advantage of size and weight over a short one. A story read next to an unusually good one is likely to suffer by comparison more than it deserves. But, all in all, such a vote as ours furnishes an invaluable guide in helping the editors make our magazine provide the kinds of story our readers want.

As last year, we give also a list of the shorter stories by themselves. Those marked with a star are of less than ten thousand words; the others are of ten thousand to twenty thousand.

1.	The Soul of a Regiment*—Talbot Mundy	6,426
2.	The Ninth Man—Edgar Young	4,074
3.	The Damned Old Nigger—Talbot Mundy	4,032
4.	On the Account—J. Allan Dunn	3,528
5.	The Epic of Silver King*—Arthur James Hayes	3,066
6.	Precedents in Piperock*—W. C. Tuttle	2,793
7.	Jack Grey, Second Mate—William Hope Hodgson	2,689
8.	The Measure of a Man—William Dudley Pelley	2,688
9.	The Blue Wolf*—Arthur James Hayes	2,226
10.	A Spur for a Jaded Nag*—Edgar Young	1,974
11.	Contraband Matrimony—Arthur D. Howden Smith	1,932
12.	The Island of Changing Shapes—H. A. Lamb	1,911
13.	Nerves of Iron*—W. C. Tuttle	1,743
14.	Honest to Doughgod*—W. C. Tuttle	1,701
15.	The Yardstick*—Edgar Young	1,659
16.	A Little Song that He Knew*—Hapsburg Liebe	1,639
17.	Kinnickinnick*—Hugh Pendexter	1,638
18.	Ritter's Pond*—E. E. Harriman	1,555
19.	The Last Wire*—Russell A. Boggs	1,554
20.	The Six Silk Shirts of Silver Sam*—J. Allan Dunn	1,533

ONE fact in the above is noteworthy—"The Soul of a Regiment" ranks ninth among all the one hundred and seventy published during the year, and ranks first of all among all the shorter stories. And, as stated at the time, "The Soul of a Regiment" was *re*-published in 1917, having first appeared in our magazine some five years before.

The annual vote by readers is both interesting and valuable. Be making your selections for the vote on our 1918 stories. It's your chance to help in editing our magazine and to make its stories a bit more to your own personal taste.

AND now a letter from Hugh Pendexter referring in part to statements concerning scalping and other Indian matters that we've previously heard at Camp-Fire. Who knows who rode the horse with four white feet? Who knows anything about

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the theory that Romans landed at Pemaquid and built paved streets there? I had thought the Romans were among the few people who had not discovered America before Columbus did.

Norway, Maine.

"Plains tribes did not shave head." Pawnee shaved the head except for a ridge. They plucked out beard and eyebrows.

THE practise of scalping was originally confined to a small area in East and on St. Lawrence River, comprising, practically, region held by Iroquois and Muskhogean tribes; absent from New England and most of Atlantic coast, and "was unknown until comparatively recent times throughout whole interior and the Plains area" (James Mooney). "A small, circular patch at root of the scalp-lock, just back of the crown," usually taken (J. M.). The whole skin of head was removed only when the practitioner was not hampered for time, then it was cut into smaller scalps and used to embellish war-shirts, leggings, etc. After a scalp was cleaned of loose flesh it was mounted on a hoop, six inches in diameter, made fast with sinews and carried at end of rod or pole. The skin, when dry, was painted red, or red and black, half and half. Hair rebraided and decorated. Given to women to carry in dance. No particular value after that. Might be tied to bridle, used for "medicine," or thrown away. See Smithsonian Rep., 1906-1907, for treatment of whole subject. Probably the greatest achievement was to throw away arms and grapple barehanded with foe.

RED CLOUD was principal chief of Oglala Teton Sioux of Pine Ridge Reservation, largest band of Sioux nation. He was the most famous chief of the tribe. Born at Forks of Platte, Nebraska, 1822. Died at Pine Ridge, December 10, 1909. Father died of rum; son rose to fame by sheer merit. Surrounded Ft. Phil Kearny with two thousand warriors, killed Capt. Fettermen and eighty-one men December 21, 1866. Fought second battle in August, 1867. Not a wagon passed during all this time. In 1868 demanded that Kearny, Ft. Reno on Powder, and Ft. C. F. Smith on Big Horn be abandoned and no further efforts made to open Montana road. These demands were basis of the treaty, the Sioux fixing limits of their country. One of most notable Indian victories ever won. Red Cloud had eighty coups to his credit. He ranked high in military strategy and was deserving great renown as a statesman. Keynote to character was patriotism. Mooney writes of him, "most courtly chief and a natural born gentleman, with a bow as graceful as that of a Chesterfield."

IT WOULD be almost always correct in saying any Indian name of a tribe meant "those people," etc. But *Dakota* is translated "allies" in "Handbook of American Indians," issued by Smithsonian Institution. Kiowa, "principal people." Pawnee name for themselves was (God forgive me for doing it) Chahiksichahika, meaning "men of men." Cherokee called themselves Ani-Yun-wiya, meaning "real people." And so on through the list if you take the Indian name for himself. The traveler goes to tribe A and guesses at its name, going by sound, or gives it a name because of some characteristic, viz., Gros Ventres, "big bellied." He asks for name of tribe B, over beyond. If A is friendly with B it will give A's name for B, descriptive, "cave people," etc. If at war, "an adder." Traveler accepts that name, goes to tribe B and inquires for tribe C. Same process, B's and C's names for themselves often being ignored. But if B's own name for itself be learned it will invariably be translated to show they're the real guys.

IT WAS stated that Kiowa, Comanche and Pawnee spring from same stock. Kiowa presents distinct linguistic stock and gives its name to the family. Comanche is Shoshonean, springing from Wyoming Shohoni. A confederate of Kiowa since 1795, and this intimate relation at first led students, perhaps, to believe the two were racially related. The Pawnee belongs to Caddoan family.

Food habits depended on nature of supply. Northern part of continent living was three-fourths animal, southern part three-fourths vegetable. Where fish could be had the Indians ate fish. Where only snakes and lizards they dined accordingly. Religious customs sometimes influenced uses of certain foods. The Apache and Navaho would not (probably will not today) eat flesh of bear or beaver or fish, the same being taboo.

WHO knows anything about who rode the horse with four white feet at Custer's battle of Little Big Horn? Dr. McChesney, army surgeon, identifies the soldier as Captain French, Seventh Cavalry. Red Horse, in his account of the battle, thought it was Custer but was not positive. Said he was the bravest man the Sioux ever saw in battle after many years of fighting many brave men. I have Red Horse's whole story of the fight, but it struck me as remarkable any warrior of experience should fail to identify Custer offhand. My clinched fists are pressed ag'in breastbone, palms down, they separate in outward, downward curve to sides. "Done," "Finished," or "That is all."—PENDEXTER.

P. S.—Squaw and papoose from Narragansett. Learned from whites by West Indians. Skunk into Neg, from Abnaki. Latin, *pupus*, "child," similar to papoose. Recall the theory of Romans landing at Pemaquid and building paved streets? Maybe they brought the term in, to filter into English through Narragansett. What?—PENDEXTER.

ALREADY we have had at Camp-Fire some of the tributes to Jack London from various of our comrades. Here are a few more of those that came in. Jack London's hold upon the admiration and affection of men who themselves know the strong, rugged, struggling side of life is remarkable and striking—and deserved.

JACK LONDON
(In Memoriam)

Strong, virile, self-made, he was a man. Only a brave, dauntless soul could have succeeded in such a bitter struggle to rise from obscurity to the fame that was and is his. But once in a generation is there born a man with his indomitable spirit. Think of what he had to contend with—ignorance, and poverty, and the lowest of environment. Yet,

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single-handed and alone, he fought on and won! He conquered every obstacle that beset his path.

IT IS said that the years are but seconds as reckoned by Eternity's clock, so it is a fitting simile to say that Jack London flashed like a brilliant meteor across the literary sky and was gone. His passing is mourned from the little cabins on the bleak Yukon to the balmy isles in the South Seas. He will not be forgotten. His work will always stand as a light, an inspiration, to countless thousands and thousands of men for bravery and red-blooded manhood. He regained for them their lost heritage—adventure! His best book unwritten, yet written, is "The Call of the Strong."

He died young in years, but not in experience, in emotion, in travel, in knowledge of humanity and the world. He had seen more of land and sea, of life and mankind, at forty than have most of us at three score and ten years. So in that sense of the word it may be said of him that he was old, that his best work had been planned and finished. It is a comfort to think so, at least.

I fancy that he was ready, even eager, to take the long, long trail, to start on the "greatest adventure of all."—GUY M. STEALEY.

JACK LONDON

During the alluring hours of the night of December 5, 1916, the pale and silent messenger tapped silently, steadily and persistently upon the chamber door of the "house of clay" of our erstwhile friend and fellow-comrade, Jack London, issuing to him a sealed summons, carrying back the soul to the God who gave it.

TO HAVE known Jack London was indeed to have been bettered along life's highways—to have looked into those alert, yet sad eyes was an indescribable pleasure. I knew Jack London, and to him I was as a "struggler." In his own language, "I know your kind, boy—just digging like old Buck for a toe-hold; I know your kind, for I have beaten out the same pathway." I knew him when he, too, was "struggling for an existence," when he was in and out, up and down, and, in all the years, not once did I know of Jack London weakening, breaking down or reaching any point near the whining stage.

WITH him in good, in bad, in plenty and in want, I learned that within his dear old bosom there beat a heart as white and as big as the "all outdoors"; that within him tingled all that was good for his fellow man, that he would hunger that his companions might eat, that he would suffer cold that they might be warm, that he would take a drenching that they might seek shelter and remain dry and comfortable.

I was with Jack London a great deal at various times. I was with him here, there and over yonder.

I HAVE in my possession a relic, one worthy of being handed down to posterity—what is supposed to be the last or one of the last personal letters ever written and signed by Jack London. The letter is dated December 3, 1916, and while of but few lines, it is one that I prize and value above all other communications in my possession. It was in reference to "The Hussy," (see *Cosmopolitan*, November, 1916), an object that had interested him, and one that, had he lived, would have led him to form and finance an expedition into the Chilean mountain country.

Jack is gone! Not dead, just gone on before, to prepare and watch and await the arrival of the vast army of his followers and admirers; just gone as an advance into that great unknown region as a brave, red-blooded and fearless Adventurer will; just stepped over the border, where his camp-fires are burning bright and forming a guiding light for the traveler who follows in his wake, just as you and I will ere so long. Jack was a faithful old scribe, and his facile pen has been placed away—not to perish, but to live and live and to enlighten future generations of the magnitude of his wonderfully fertile brain. The great scribe has, in his demise, written his masterpiece, and received the honorarium of Jehovah.—WANDERING WEBB.

JACK LONDON

You sang of spirits bold,
Who dared to venture into no-man's land.
Brave souls and true,
Each one a noble type by God's command.
Adventure was their quest,
As far out in the frozen North,
Habitable neither for beast nor man,
In little groups they ventured forth.
Though dead thy spirit lives,
As those that blaze the trail,
All chant thy praises to the wind,
The snow, the rain, the hail.—JOHN MADDEN.

YOU will notice that our magazine opens three new departments in this issue. These are times when it behooves all of us to render every national service within our power. *Adventure* is an American magazine, its readers are Americans or citizens of the Allied countries. Two of the three new departments are devoted to helping win the war. The other department looks farther into the future. When we were at peace, *Adventure* was a strong advocate of preparedness for war. Now when we are at war, *Adventure* advocates preparedness for the peace that is to follow victory. The vigorous prosecution of the war demands all our energies, but there is left to us time for thinking and the duties of citizenship demand of us that we do this thinking.

Even if *Adventure* were only a fiction magazine its duty would be plain. But it is far more than a fiction magazine. This Camp-Fire of ours has gathered together all classes and through a common interest become for them almost a class publication. The very character of its readers has drifted our Camp-Fire talks to more serious affairs; it has become a forum for exchange of views. These new departments are only a natural expression of the spirit and interests of our readers.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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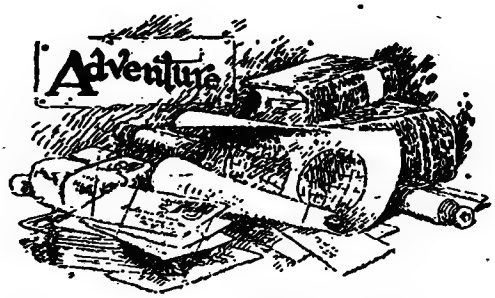

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure,* New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Will sell: 1916—July, August, September, October, November, December—2. 1917—April, July—2. Mid-October, Mid-December. 1918—First January, First February—2. Mid-February, First March, Mid-March, First April, Mid-April—15 cents each. Free F. O. B. Gravenhurst if wanted for over seas or to complete files.—GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ontario, Canada.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp at the Front, or in Hospital.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure,*" letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

PRIVATE JOSEPH YANOVCKE, care of *Adventure.*

WILL T. DAVENPORT, care of *Adventure.*

FRANCIS W. FEENEY, care of *Adventure.*

JAMES C. MINETT, care of *Adventure.*

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1302 N St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's,* Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

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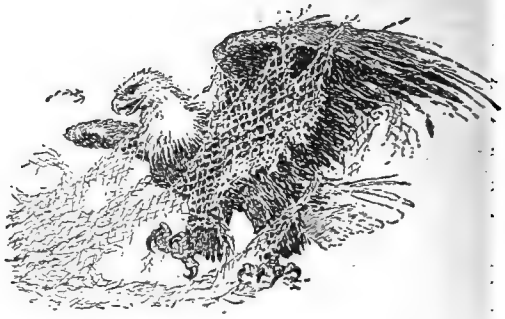
FIGHTING THE HUN WEB



A department devoted to throwing light upon the Actual working of the subtle German propaganda in the United States, Canada and the other Allied countries. Every time you discover one of the strands of this web, tell the rest of us about it, briefly but clearly. Once seen, it loses its dangerous power.

"GERMAN efficiency" is merely thoroughness. Thoroughness in bringing the German people, body, mind and soul, under the thumb of a few Germans. Thoroughness in organizing these people into military, commercial, industrial and social machines for the one object of getting all the rest of the world under this same evil thumb. "German efficiency" is so thorough in its drive for this one object that it treats all moral and human rights as mere obstructions in its path. So thorough that it goes back to the very beginnings of things and makes *ideas* its starting-point, for all material things have their beginnings in ideas and are shaped and controlled by them. Then, working forward with infinite patience and attention to detail, it makes these ideas grow into material agents of destruction. The seed bears its fruit, but always the Germans keep planting more seed to grow into more fruit.

WE WHO hate the Huns, and particularly we Americans, have been making a mistake, but we are beginning to wake up to that mistake. We used to combat Germany only by trying to destroy the fruit, letting her go on almost unhindered in her planting of more seed. Now we are seeing the need of combating *what makes the fruit.*

We have found that we must fight her *propaganda* as well as the results of that propaganda. We must fight her armies, but we must also fight the system of lies, deceit and false ideals that makes men willing to serve in her armies. We must combat her attempts to make internal and international troubles for the nations arrayed against her, but we must also combat the system of rumors, slanders and influences that create these troubles.

WITH her armies, ships and industrial system alone, strong as they are, Germany could not have held out so long against us. What has kept her in the field is the subtle, hidden, steel-silk web the Hun spider weaves. When the real history of the war is written it will show that Germany owes most of her successes during past years to the highly organized system of propaganda that not only fooled her own people but fooled us her enemies into dissensions, indecisions, hesitancies, blunders and distractions at the times essential to the successes of her armed forces.

That web is a subtle web. Even yet we have discovered only part of it. Even yet we have only begun to realize the fulness and permanence of its danger to us.

LUCKILY for us, that web has one great weakness. *It can not stand the light.* Once an American, Canadian or any other of the Allies clearly sees a strand of that web and recognizes it for what it is, it can no longer bind him to its will, its power for evil is gone. If it is made plain to an American that by his actions he is helping Germany in exactly the way she wants him to help her, that he has been her unconscious tool and dupe, after that he will no longer help her or be her tool. That is the weakness of the Hun web.

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THE purpose of this department is to help turn the light on the hidden German web.

There are many of us. Each of us from time to time discerns some strand of it. It is his immediate duty to warn all the others. And this department is the place to do it.

It is not our province to direct suspicion upon individuals. It is methods we are hunting—the reports, innuendoes, charges, dissensions and distractions that form the web. Do your part. Every thread we destroy with the light of publicity saves American lives on the firing-line and makes safer our future after the war.

Be brief and to the point. We want sign-boards rather than essays. Since a magazine is made up ahead, it will be several months before the warnings now sent in can be published, but they will appear as soon as possible. Do your part. A. S. H.

LOOKING AHEAD

"Win the War but Get Ready for Peace"

NO MATTER how long the war lasts, it is our first duty during that time to work unrelentingly for victory. But we have a second duty. In peace we failed to prepare for war. In war we must not fail to prepare for peace.

To help in meeting this second duty while we are meeting the first, *Adventure* has instituted this department. Its main purpose is to direct our readers' attention more definitely to the many problems America will face when peace comes and to offer an open forum for exchange of views.

In order to hear from as many as possible each expression of opinion must be limited to *not more than one hundred and fifty words at most.* Merely state the problem that, to you, seems most urgent, adding briefly if you like, your idea of the right solution. The department's value lies in the opinions taken as a whole, not in any one of them.

"Looking Ahead" is not a place for editorial opinion. It is a forum for the opinions of as many as possible; its office is to seek the concensus of those opinions as a guide and stimulus to all. The editors will do their honest best to make the selection for publication as closely as possible indicative of the proportionate importance given the various problems and suggestions by the Americans of all classes and conditions who read our magazine.

It is up to you as an American to do your part. If you haven't thought about these things, think now. Then tell us what you think.

All contributions must be signed, with address given. Only initials will be printed if you insist, but the Nation's problems are matters on which an American should not be afraid to speak over his own name. —A. S. H.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
B. W. BRINTNALL, 5527 33d Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay: river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, 5036 Utica St., Denver, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. Ry. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y.); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Arlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake, Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, 415 Eighth Ave., Huntington, West Va. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports: hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE R. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, care Authors' League of America, 33 West 42d St., New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs, opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico; the Bureau of Insular affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

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The following Ask Adventure editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lockwitzky.

Sourdough Recipe

Question:—"Will you please give me the recipe for making sourdough bread, as the "sourdoughs" of Alaska made it? If this letter is published in *Adventure* please withhold my name."— —— ——, East Alburgh, Vt.

Answer by Mr. Solomons:—I will tell you all about sourdough bread with a great deal of pleasure, only there is regret mixed with the pleasure—regret that I have not a toothsome hunk of it to butter and eat right now!

It is really a very simple matter. Any dough, allowed to ferment, as any starchy product will do if it remains moist and warm, will start sourdough bread for you, but in actual practise it is found that it makes better bread to start it with a regular yeast-cake or other yeast. The reason would be quickly grasped by any dairyman who knows how much better butter he makes from a "culture" that is palatable.

The fact is that many varieties of bacteria exist which set up the fermentation which results in gas and alcohol and, later, acetic acid. It is the gas, of course, that makes the bread, the very identical gas that makes it in baking-powder or sour milk and soda or any other way. It is just a matter of differences in the chemical processes that liberate this gas—carbon dioxid.

Now some of these kinds of bacteria, when they multiply in the bread and set up the chemical process, impart to the bread a better flavor than do others, and the yeast men know this and secure the nicer kinds. If you left it to the atmosphere to furnish the brand it would likely be a less palatable one.

So start a "regular" batch of bread, *and save some of the dough after* it has risen the first time. To be "technical," save some of the sponge, and simply add a little more water and a little more flour. Most Alaskans keep this sourdough in a small covered pail with a bail by which they keep it suspended over the stove or anywhere where it will not get chilled. *It must not* get hot or the bacteria will be killed and then good-by to your sourdough.

You take maybe a pint or two pints in the pail for your batch and then add another pint of flour and water, stirring it up carefully and leaving it of the consistency of a very heavy batter, so that it resumes a level surface rather slowly. If you leave

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it very long—a week or less—better add more flour and water, for if you do not the bacteria may get out of food, the dough get very sour and then later spoil.

Well now, you take this sourdough into your bread-pan and mix water with it till it is thin, and then flour enough to make a heavy sponge (not a stiff dough). Into it you add a bit of soda, if you object to the slightly sour taste, which is excellent, like that of real French bread (which is a sourdough bread of a certain type) and salt, of course, and anything else you wish (it makes elegant raised fancy breads and cakes of every sort) and handle it just as regular yeast-raised bread from now on, kneading once or twice, according to how you like to make bread. The principles are the same; the sourdough is merely a means of perpetuating the usefulness of the family of bacteria in the one yeast-cake instead of using a new cake each time. However, you get a fine effect, we Alaskans think.

How to Get a Deck Job

Question:—"Writing from Wellington, N. Z., I would like some information concerning navigation.

"I am twenty-nine years of age and an American by birth. Ever since my childhood, I have wanted to roam and from time to time in my eighteenth, again in my twentieth and twenty-second year, I have tried to make a ship in such ports as San Francisco, San Pedro, Seattle, New York and Boston, but always failed on account of being a first tripper.

"Eventually, I made my first trip in early 1915, at age of twenty-six, from New Orleans to Liverpool as muleteer. Since, I have been assistant baker on Atlantic lines, assistant cook from London to Auckland, New Zealand, where I deserted ship; assistant butcher on Pacific liner and now I am a steward in the U. S. S. Co.'s boats from Wellington to Frisco.

"What beats me is this: Why won't they give me a job on deck? Is it because I started in the steward's department, I must pursue that occupation until the end?

"Of course, when I made my start in England after that mule-boat trip, I had my choice, but I didn't want to ship as O. S. or boy at that £2|10 a month, against £7 a month in the bake-shop or galley. You mustn't suppose that I had any experience in these trades; I was really only what they call scullery hand.

"Now when I look for a ship, the first question is, 'Have you been to sea before?' Then, 'Show your discharges.' Chief officer then directs me to steward's department. It's no good me telling him I want to get on deck, being ambitious to be a navigator. The steward's department wants help and to that department I must go.

"Now, is this true of American ships as well or is it only the custom of the British merchant service?

"It's not from lack of patriotism that I have chosen British ships, but my *Wanderlust* I must satisfy. American ships cover only certain spots of this earth and I am only content when I enter new fields. British ships have carried me to Egypt Gallipoli at the time of the British landing, South Africa, Tasmania, Australia, New Zealand, Rarotonga and Tahiti.

"I have heard of a free school of navigation at San Francisco run by the Government. What qualifications are necessary to become a pupil in that school? To the best of your knowledge, please let me know the short cut to being a navigator. My dream is to roam the seas on a tramp steamer."—EDWARD ECKHARDT, Seattle, Washington.

Answer, by Mr. Tucker:—In taking up the matter of your question I feel a great deal of sympathy for your case, for the fact of the matter is that you got started wrong and it was almost impossible to change. Naturally the new man who has had ever so little experience in one department but none in any other is put in his old line of work. The only way to get out of it that I know of is to start at the bottom and work up.

But right now there is a great chance for any man to start in the U. S. merchant marine and get a good training and good pay at the same time.

Look up the U. S. Shipping Board in the first city you are in and I think you will find the opportunity you are wishing for. I have before me as I write the following newspaper notice:

> "Men without sea-going experience, between twenty-one and thirty years of age will be accepted for the new merchant crews and will not only be exempted from draft but will be given proper preliminary instruction on the shipping board's training ships."

There is your chance for the change you want and a good training into the bargain and on top of all you will be serving your country.

Roughing It in New Jersey

Question:—"Although New Jersey isn't mentioned in your department or in any department, I am writing in hopes of your being able to help me. On what lakes and creeks may I camp where fishing is good? What fish may be caught? Where is the best hunting in New Jersey? What fur-bearing animals may be got?

"Do you know of any book on the subject of camping, fishing and hunting in New Jersey?

"What herbs are gathered in New Jersey? Where are they marketed? Will thank you for any road maps as I am a motorcyclist."—TEDD WILLIAMS, Camden, New Jersey.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—New Jersey is out of my line, but I think you will find "the pineries" the best territory to go to; you have only a few miles to go on your motorcycle over to the head of Mullica River and thence down into "the plains" country. This is the wildest, most nearly uninhabited territory in New Jersey, and you can camp down anywhere you want. Of course, you will find sandy roads and rough riding, but I've ridden fifteen thousand miles on a motorcycle over all kinds of roads, from woods trails to concrete.

Get a road map of New Jersey—through any book dealer or news dealer. Would suggest for your motorcycle camping outfit a light cord hammock; a waterproof tarpaulin to hang over whole length of hammock, or to wrap yourself up in, with good light woolen blanker.

With this outfit and matches for fire, a small bag full of grub, and a drinking-cup you can stop anywhere, swing the hammock between two trees and sleep all night. A few yards of cheesecloth will make it fly and bug and mosquito proof, and you can sleep out in the rain, with the motorcyle beside the hammock, under the tarpaulin.

Write to H. R. Lathrop, 116 Beekman St., New

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York City, for price lists of herbs; get their "Profitable Herbs," ten cents, and get "Medical Herbs" free, of Department of Agriculture, Washington, District of Columbia.

Opportunities in the Cattle Country

Question:—"I am a young man of nineteen and would like work on a cattle ranch. I am in good health and can handle cattle fairly well. I wish you would advise me of the best place suitable for my purposes, the duties of a ranch hand, and pay. Being a greenhorn I am not accustomed to the West. Are Arizona and Nevada very thickly populated, can you tell me?"—H. E. FINSTUBACH, Camp Wadsworth, S. C.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—There are still some old-time cattle ranges in Arizona, New Mex., Wyoming, Montana, and the Coast States, but barbed-wire has taken the place of mounted punchers to a large extent. There was a man in this city last week who owns a 16,000-acre ranch of the old style, but with some modern improvements, such as wire fences.

If you want to get into the cattle business in Montana, go to Miles City and make your start from there. In Wyoming, make Cheyenne your base. In Arizona go to Phoenix. In New Mexico —well,—you can take your choice. In Washington, Spokane or Colfax. In Oregon, the city of Pendleton. In California, write to Miller & Lux, San Francisco, asking for a job and details regarding pay, etc.

If you want to get into a place where they raise cattle and other things, too, try Salt River Valley, Arizona; Imperial Valley, California; Snake River Valley, Washington; anywhere west of the Cascade Range in Oregon. Any of the big valleys in Wyoming and Montana are full of the best grade of cattle and horses, as well as grain fields, etc. Wyoming claims to raise the best average horses west of the Mississippi River.

Arizona had but 59,620 population in 1890. Nevada only 45,761.

They have both increased their population largely since then, but are just as far behind the other States as ever. The reason is simple.

Both States are principally producers of minerals, though both have parts where agriculture and fruit-raising are excellent. Neither State has any particular reason for having heavily congested city population. About your pay, that is something I can not approximate.

Dragging for Quahogs

Question:—"Can you tell me where to get quahog drags and how much they cost? Are quahogs high in Summer? I am a fisherman and would like to go after quahogs if there is any money in it."—R. E. SMITH, South Portland, Me.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—In these waters the fishermen use rakes instead of drags; but I understand down your way the quahog is more plentiful, and it is possible to use the oyster drags. These cost according to the locality and blacksmith who makes them; around New York and Jersey they cost from $40. to $60. a set of four. Any fisherman, oysterman etc., ought to be able to tell you more definitely about your own waters than I can as to where to get the drags or rakes.

In Summer the trade is brisk, and just now there is a good market. Price, too, depends on locality. About here, with the great New York market at hand, the average price for large and small mixed runs about $2.50 a bushel. The large ones are sold by count, and the small by measure.

I am sorry if my information does not cover your needs; but this is really something more easily answered out of local knowledge than by any general information. I can, however, give you this piece of knowledge, that our sloops down here are worked by two men usually, the owner, and one man; the man receives a one-quarter share of the catch, the two divide the grub bill, and the owner keeps the sloop in order out of his share. And the quarter share of the hand runs anywhere from twenty to fifty dollars a week—I have known a quarter share to amount to eighty dollars for three days' work.

One other matter, is this, that at least around here it is not permitted to drag for clams or quahog with power boats. If you have power in your sloop, you must shut it off and sail while your drags are down. In fact, as they fish here, it is useless to have power anyhow, except for making port after working. The sloop must be laid to and drift down the wind with all four drags out to windward.

But these things again are likely to be different in different localities.

Farming in Englehart Region

Question:—"Will you give me some information about the district about Englehart as to the soil, timber, fish, game, fur and climate? What would be the cost of equipment for running a trap line this Winter and locating a homestead in the Spring? Where can I obtain a minute map with surveyings and lots marked for locating? I am a ship calker by trade and have a wife and two small boys and intend making a start for myself this Fall."—CHARLES L. BARBER, St. Catharines, Ont.

Answer, by Mr. Sangster:—The region contiguous to Haileybury or Englehart is claimed by the Ontario Government to be A-1 for farming and, from my knowledge, I believe it is more or less so, with wide possibilities as the forest is cleared more and more; it lies in the celebrated Clay Belt.

It is a good fishing, fair big-game and fur area. The cost of an outfit for trapping depends chiefly on the degrees into which this line is followed up; the more trap-line covered, the more traps and shelters needed.

My suggestion is that you write the Director of the Department of Colonization, Toronto, Ont., asking for full data as to available land in the section involved and if available, a map in detail showing same. They have some interesting literature.

Capable men are scarce and wages high all through the North Country and I think you would succeed. Let me know results. I'll be glad to hear your decision.

South Seas' Chances

Question:—"I have had ever since I was knee-high to a snake's belly an awful hankering to go to the South Sea Islands. I put in several years at sea, my first cruise being when I was eleven years old. Since then I have shipped on whalers and am now in the U. S. Navy. What I want to find out is this:

"What are the chances for a planter or settler?

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What product finds the best market and how is trading? How large a stake should a fellow have? I am used to roughing it and can live on practically nothing."—O. F. TURNER, Boston, Massachusetts.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—Glad to notice that you are doing your bit. You certainly started out young. The wonder is that you did not get south instead of north—although I've seen whales in plenty in the south that is so far south that it becomes Antarctic!

There are chances in plenty for an energetic planter in the South Sea Islands—and just as many for an enterprising trader who will work the smaller groups. There is a wide-open field for cultivation of tropical products—coconuts for copra, from which oil is extracted for making good quality soaps, etcetera, rubber, of the growing of which the industry is merely infantile so far; cotton, cocoa, coffee, bananas, pineapples, oranges, and then some more. There is a big and eager market for copra and bananas, the fruit coming to New Zealand and Australia. An American might find other markets, for there will be a revelation and revolution in trading and cultivation in the South Seas after the war—or I miss my guess and calculations.

You will not need to rough it so much in the islands as you will need to have patience. It is not a get-rich-quick area. There is more Glamour than Romance, more Sweat than Silver, more Lethargy than Loot. The oyster of success is there to open—as in any other attractive field of adventure and originality—but it needs stickativeness to succeed. In a land where it is always afternoon, the seduction of the loaf (to lazy) is not to make bread.

The amount of stake you need to start over there depends almost wholly upon your ambitions. You do not need any more money to prospect the South Seas than you do to spy out the land anywhere else. To the moderately careful man it is not an expensive area, and he certainly gets the value of his money, for the earth yields her increase gloriously and Nature is beauteous and bounteous.

Jobs for the Asking

Question:—"Are conditions good in Alberta or British Columbia for a boy of eighteen, who is willing to do any work in order to live? Are there any ranches that would employ a tenderfoot? Can you give me the names of a few ranchmen? Also advise me as to the necessary steps I would have to take to get a position on a ranch?"—G. F. HILTZ, Berwick, Nova Scotia.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The necessary steps to take to get a job on a ranch in the West at present are to go either to Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary or Edmonton and make a noise like a man out of work. The demand for help is far in excess of the supply. You do not need the names of any ranchmen. The employment agents will place you anywhere you want to go.

Fifty dollars a month and found is being paid for the most ordinary greenhorns while a willing man can easily get sixty-five when he has shown his mettle. Sure they take tenderfeet and darned glad to get them.

You need have no misgivings about tackling the West as it never was better than at present. As to the nature of the work I do not know that it differs very much from the work on the Eastern farms except that things may be on rather a larger scale. Men are well treated and do not have to work very hard except at harvesting and threshing times and then the pay is enough to justify a little extra exertion. I know ranchers here in western Washington who keep a Ford car for their men to run into town with when they have a night off, which is several times per week.

Come ahead and take a chance for if one place does not suit you there are plenty of others and if you do not do well it is your own fault which is really some consolation.

Knocking About in Argentina

Question:—"I am twenty-four years of age, have a high-school education and have traveled a bit—twenty-eight States and several foreign countries. I have no special trade being, I suppose, a Jack-of-all-trades, but am very good in the selling of goods.

"I want to go to Buenos Aires. My capital is limited (about $150); would like to work my way down. What route would you advise? Is there much stuff going south out of Galveston now? Almost none when I was there a year ago. How's New Orleans?

"Could a man go to Tampico on a snapper boat from Galveston and get connections out of Vera Cruz or there? Speak Spanish a bit as I lived a while in Mexico and Cuba. Do you think a man could 'get by' in Buenos? When does the wheat harvest start there and what are the wages? Would not like to go East to take the Lamport & Holt if it is possible to avoid doing so."—AUGUST BLUE, Denver Colorado.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—I struck Buenos Aires a few years ago just as you are figuring on doing—on the spec. I caught a Russian freighter from Barbados to Rio and from there I went overland to Montevideo and over to B. A. on a Mojanowitz.

I caught on as stenographer with Agar, Cross and Co., No. 28 Calle Defensa, at eight native dollars a day, paid every night, for the boss said he knew I was a tourist and wouldn't stop long. There is a lot of work in B. A., and they send quite a number out of there during the harvest.

This company I have mentioned hire threshing-machine engineers and send them out. In 1910 it was possible to earn a couple of hundred dollars American money a week in this line running the high-speed oil-motor threshers. Most of the big farmers in Argentine are Jews in the Gran Chaco country.

A foreigner can catch on with the railroads in mechanical work or engine-driving. The docks are another place. Any American company is good to strike for work and you are pretty sure of landing with each one.

You know the game; get the job and then hold it no matter what it is. I worked at everything conceivable down there and have my first work to fall down on.

It's hard to get from New Orleans or Galveston to Brazil or Argentine. More so now during the war. Better work out from New York. You will have to get a passport before any of the companies will hire you.

There are several freight lines that make calls at B. A. If you don't catch on with one of them get a Lamport & Holter to Rio and get a freighter from there, or go overland as I did. It's a hard trip overland by rail but there is some new country to see.

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HOW TO HELP WIN THE WAR

A Department Telling What *YOU* Can Do And How to Find Out about It.

To make such a department comprehensive, reliable and up to date entails much work and considerable machinery. Since this machinery has already been created and put into operation, *Adventure* can render service most efficiently by giving its readers the use of this practical agency for connecting individual willingness with national needs.

***Adventure's* big brother, *Everybody's Magazine*, now conducts a "War Service Guide."**

There are thousands of good Americans who, with all their hearts, want to help in the big job at hand, but do not know what to do or how to find it and it is these patriots which *Everybody's* "Guide" wants to help enlist where they can be of real service. If you are one of them, write to Mr. Hoyt, care of *Everybody's* "Guide," Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Tell him your circumstances and your qualifications—whether you are looking for volunteer or paid work, whether you can give all or part time, in your home town only or anywhere the job may call you. Give him all the data he may need to judge what work you might do. There are "bits" to be done in farm and industrial work, in various relief organizations and in the Government offices as well as in the Army and Navy.

***Everybody's* "Guide" will also be glad to tackle any question of allowance or allotment, Government insurance or legal status growing out of the new and closer relationship which many are forming with Uncle Sam. Let *Everybody's* "Guide" try to help you.**

Do YOUR Part

Find out what to do and how to do it by writing to *Everybody's* "War Service Guide," Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

CHANTLES, MEMER DE. Age 40, dark hair and eyes, stout, said to be native of Poughkeepsie, N. Y., has relatives in or near New York. Worked as nurse in Norfolk, Va., 1900. Well known around Middlesex County, Mass. Last heard of at Norfolk, 1901. Any relative or acquaintance will please correspond with.—Address DR. CHAS. LEE, care of *Adventure*.

HARPER, LAFAYETTE. Grandfather. Last heard from about 1900, in Texas. He is about 70 years old. Will pay any one for trouble in letting me know of his whereabouts.—Address F. L. HARPER, Chestnut, La.

WESTFALL, CLARENCE V. (Address unknown.) Very important that you communicate immediately with sister at Morgantown. Matters are in process of adjustment.—Address L. D. W., care of *Adventure*.

STARKS, PERCY RAYMOND. Age 25, height 5 ft. 9 in., weight about 170, brown hair and blue eyes. Carpenter by trade and was interested in Pastor Russell's teachings. Home is in Chico, California; last heard of in Douglas, Arizona, in 1915-16. Any one knowing his present address please notify.—L. B. PENTZ, Room 14, Schmelz Bldg., Newport News, Va.

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KING, FRANK M. Age 36, weight 150 lbs., light complexion, dresses well, an automobile mechanic and driver by trade. Was last heard from in Paris, Texas, about three years ago, and is believed to be somewhere in the Northwest. He is very popular with the fair sex and is a boomer of the purest stripe. One only of his kind and disposition alive and if you ever meet him you will readily recognize him from the description above. All automobile men take notice.—Address HOMER F. SHIVERS, 1022 N. 6th St., Ft. Smith, Ark.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WILL relatives of FRANKLIN J. FELLOWS, born in Tonawanda, N. Y., lived in Brooklyn, N. Y., and Long Island, N. Y., address FRANKLIN J. FELLOWS, 225 Howard St., New London, Conn.

STEWART, BEN, blacksmith by trade, an old sourdough, who worked at Grand Cañon, Summer of 1916. Please write. I am the lad that packed across the Cañon into Utah. Have something I think will interest you.—Address ROBERT A. HALL, Box 1553, Jerome, Ariz.

HAMMACK (COUNT) B. H. Prize-fighter, aeronaut and soldier of fortune. Have something good, write at once. Last heard of in San Francisco. Any information will be appreciated.—Address H. C. TURNBULL, Hopewell, Va.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

DOOLITLE, J. C. Last heard from in Michigan, native State is Florida. Please tell me where you are.—Address "ROBBY," care of E. GREEN, 104 N. 4th St., Hopewell, Va.

VAN TASSEL, "RED." Last heard of in Little Rock, Ark. Any information relative to his whereabouts at present would be greatly appreciated by "FRISCO DICK," 45 Woodward Ave., Apt. 17, Atlanta, Ga.

JOHNSON, J. C. (STAND FAST), who was with me in Mexico during the Revolution; members of the Constitutional Army, in General Obregone's Division. Also with me in Central America some two years before going to Mexico.—Address SERGEANT W. J. (BLACKIE) DICKINSON, American Rest Camp Hospital, No. 34, A. E. F., England.

I WOULD like to hear from some of the bunch who were on the "Drag Line" between Button Willow and Lost Hills, California, in 1913-14-15. ANDY, please write.—Address CPR. JESSE P. BLAIR, Battery F., 9th U.S.F.A., Fort Sill, Okla.

GOLDEN, JIMMIE, who soldiered with me in Co. I, 10th U.S. Inf., at Honolulu and Fort St. Michael, Alaska. Would like to hear from you, old pal.—Address GEORGE P. HARGER, Sergeant, 2nd Co., C.A.C., Fort Amador, Canal Zone, Panama.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-August or First September issue of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ADAMS (two aunts and uncle); Albritton, Tom and Jessie; Baumier, Austin; Berry, Nellie; Brownhill, Timothy and William; Bruffey, Elmer; Carmichael, Archibald; Glanman, All.; Gross, Louis; Harris, Geo.; Haley, Robt. E. Lee; Hayne, Emil; Key, Thos. W.; McAlvey, Maggie, William and John; McNellis, (William White); Montgomery, Samuel; Nelson, Benjamin Earl; O'Connor, Frank; Rasner, John; Robinson, James and Edward; Ruble, Ralph E.; Thornton, Vic.; Timpton, Clyde; "Texas," Zachon, John.

MISCELLANEOUS—Woodford, William; Householder, Bud; Gerbrick, Commillus.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays, Jack P. Robinson, Ray Ozmer.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address J. E. COX, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-OCTOBER ADVENTURE

Besides the two novelettes mentioned in the ad on page 2 the Mid-October number, in your hands on September 18, will contain the following stories:

MURDER — *By Gordon Young*
An inviting note dropped on his table by a strange woman—and the trouble had started for young *Berg*.

GRICE'S GIRL — *By Wilbur Hall*
A tale of Dos Palmas, on the edge of the Southwestern desert, and the queer closing of the Tourmaline mine.

A MAN'S WOMAN — *By Hapsburg Liebe*
Into the Tennessee hills this story will take you—where a youngster often is much older than his years.

THE WINGED AVENGER — *By Charles Beadle*
How the sleeping sickness—sparing neither white nor black—sweeps through the African jungle.

A LITTLE JIGGER THIS MORNIN' — *By Charles Tenney Jackson*
Concerning *Colonel T. Sambola Tunk*, seh, of Kentucky, *Mr. Gilfish*, a church member in good standing, and a bar'l of the vintage of '51.

CIRCULAR 473 — *By Russell A. Boggs*
A railroad story of the West where the duties of a station agent are often unusual.

"COMMODORE" WEAVER—SHADY ADVENTURER — *By H. D. Cousens*
A suave manner, a strong personality, a palatial yacht—and the world lay before "Commodore" Weaver for the taking.

THE WESTERN DOOR SWINGS OPEN — *By Hugh Pendexter*
Frontier days—back to 1762 this story takes you, to the time when the Iroquois held the balance of power between the French and the English.

THE BELLS OF SAN JUAN. Part III — *By Jackson Gregory*
In the third part of this stirring tale of the Southwest a new wave of crime breaks out around San Juan—one which amazes even *Jim Galloway*.

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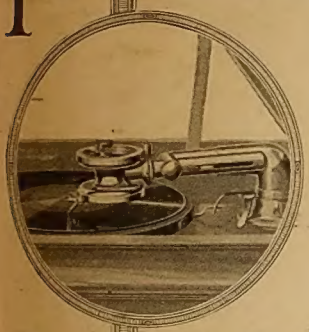
Two Great Features

of The Brunswick Method of Reproduction

1



The Ultona—

a unique feature of The Brunswick Method of Reproduction. Now you can play all makes of records at their best.

FIRST, you want a phonograph which plays all records exactly as they are designed to be played. Records are not yet standard. Different artists sing or play for different concerns.

So there is no universal reproducer, no universal needle. Until The Brunswick Method of Reproduction brought The Ultona, one had to be satisfied with a one-record instrument or else resort to makeshift attachments.

The Ultona makes The Brunswick a universal player—each record is played precisely as the maker specifies. The Ultona presents to each type of record the proper diaphragm and needle.

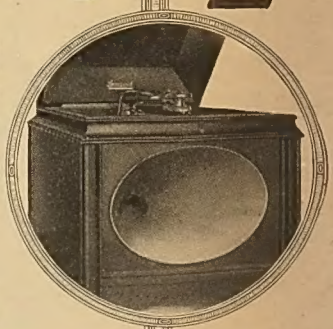
Yet please understand that The Ultona is not an attachment, but an altogether new and exclusive conception. At the turn of the wrist it adjusts itself. It is always ready. You can play one record after another, of different make.

Second, you want a phonograph like

The Brunswick

ALL PHONOGRAPHS IN ONE

2



The Brunswick Amplifier

a new idea in tone reproduction, departing from old-time crudities. Tones hitherto lostare now brought out in rich clarity.

because of its superior tone. The Brunswick regains all the tones hitherto lost, for it embodies a new amplifier, built entirely of wood.

Metal construction, we ascertained by test, cannot release and expand sound waves.

So the "throat" and the "mouth" of The Brunswick are of rare holly wood, moulded to meet acoustic requirements.

The result, as you will note instantly, is more faithful reproduction, with complete avoidance of the metallic, rasping noises.

Prove to yourself that The Brunswick is your personal choice. A comparison is simple. Your ear can decide.

And we gladly urge you to make these tests before you buy. Brunswick Dealers everywhere join us in inviting you to hear The Brunswick

THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER CO.

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Branch Houses in Principal Cities of United States, Mexico and Canada

Canadian Distributors, Musical Merchandise Sales Co., Excelsior Life Building, Toronto

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Wedding Bells for 56,230

Fifty thousand girls were married last year from the million Delineator families. More will be married this year. You may not manufacture wedding-rings or trousseaux, or traveling-bags, or furniture for the new home, but if you make any article used in American households, you should tell these fifty thousand brides about it. They start in where their mothers did before them by relying for advice on

The
Delineator

The Magazine In One Million Homes

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